To begin this brief history of modern painting, I would like to start off by mentioning just why it is important to do so. Despite not being an admirer of his work, Virgil Abloh, founder of “streetwear” brand Off-White and later on the creative director of Louis Vuitton, had this to say on the subject:

So when involving yourself in modern works of art, regardless of whether or not they are accepted into the canon of the art world, being literate in the works of the European masters can lay a foundation by which to draw inspiration for your own art, whether it be literature, beatmaking, or simple meme drawing.

To frame this, I would like to begin with this quote by Ralph Waldo Emerson, taken from his essay titled “History” in 1841.

“All history becomes subjective; in other words, there is properly no history, only biography”

The quote draws light to the fact that much like ourselves, by the nature of language, we only know who we are, in many ways, in relation only to the words we have been taught to express ourselves through, words that rely not only of our own understanding of them, but of what others agree upon as what they understand those words to mean. In the case of history, there is properly none available of *it*; much like the character of Jesus in the bible, we know that he may have existed, but even that is up for debate - all we truly know of him are of the four biographies written by him by the four evangelists. In this way, Jesus or even King George III, and by nature, the identity of people as Christians or Americans, rely on what a subjective historian’s biography of said figure he claimed was history. It is for this reason, as I will come to show, that history painting, once the most prized of all painting practices, came to be replaced by what today we consider modern art - but in the process, the nature of biography remained the same.

For this reason, amongst others, some art historians, as I will choose to do today, claim the foundation of what we consider today modern art to begin with this painting, *The Death of Marat*, by French painter Jacques-Louis David. Born and necessitated by the French revolution, within this visual biography of European history do we see the foundation of modern art, and by that virtue, the definitions of freedom, still to come. Marat, the man in the painting being killed, belonged to the political party of the Montagnards, enemies of the Girondin political faction. Marat was killed by Charlotte Corday, part of said enemy Girondin faction, who Marat believed came to visit him in hopes of shedding her alliance with the Girondins in favor of Marat and the rest of the French revolution. A Judas type figure, David, the painter, and an ally to the revolution himself, decided to immortalize this moment by ushering in modern art as we know it. David the painter, himself a Jacobin, was part of the lawyers that devised and laid the way for the French ideal of liberte to later be exported as a global value, having voted for the death of the French king himself. This of course, however, must not overlook what Luke said of Christ's attitude towards lawyers in the New Testament:

Jesus replied, "And you experts in the law, woe to you, because you load people down with burdens they can hardly carry, and you yourselves will not lift one finger to help them." At the time, women were still not allowed to weigh in on the matters of Jacobian dialogues - they were only permitted to listen in from the balconies as they controlled the biography of men from history's background.

So heavy was this new foundation and cry for liberty by the French that they decided it would need a new man, and a new calendar. While never adopted over the Gregorian calendar, the revolutionists believed so righteously in their revolution that they declared the year of its commencement the new year zero. In turn with the necessity of a new calendar, so too would David hope to paint a new man in accordance with the speed, and the values, of the French revolution.

Pictured here is an illustration made by David in the image of previous history paintings commissioned by French nobility. Notice the shape of the bodies, their voluptuous and highly muscularized forms by which the French, and therefore, the European man, is mythologized through what the French and Europe considers to be the Western ideals of masculinity laid out by the Greeks and the Romans. Their bodies are not simply masculine; they are the masculine ideal, one removed from truth that only through the power of the subjectivity of history, through biography, hoped to make mythology out of men.

It is out of the act of making mythology of men that Western art was formed. Seen here is not the male body, as we would like to take it, but a biography of it, a form made in what the West would consider its highest image, the Greek and roman ideal. Muscles are made into ornament by lighting and painting techniques that turn ligaments on skin into x rays of them in portraiture. The red of the blanket beneath the man is as fanciful, and as much of decor, as the man's muscles themselves in this depiction, the coarseness or weight of the fabric made in the image of the muscles that David was instructed to make immortal. Form, not the body itself, was more important in writing history through painting than the subjectivity of the artist's reality.

The necessity for biography continues into the modern day as evidenced by the images of figures such as Alexander Hamilton, and the rest of the American founding fathers, and the American iconography, on American currency. What gives these bills value, can then be said, is not simply the bonds paid back to create them, to make sure they never lose the exchange currency they are biographies of. The value assigned to this cloth biography of Alexander Hamilton, in turn, has value assigned to it in relation not just to consumer goods, but the cultural value of the visual cloth biographies of men like Marat themselves. These dead presidents, as rappers so often ennoble them, represent more than simply wealth in this instance: they represent the weight of a nation's past, present and future. Was it the vision of a man like Hamilton that ended up giving this cloth depiction of him this value, or is it our collective effort, between the state and its civilians, that continues to make the idea of the bill more valuable than the cloth it is printed on today? For it is through his image, and what we make of the biography of him on American currency, as a founding father made in the light of the French statue of liberty, or as simply a white supremacist, that the identities of Americans are destined to be sealed in the coming decades. Who is to say what gives Alexander Hamilton his value - the fact that we can verify the bills printed with his face on it through the watermark of him on them, or the fact that, in labeling him a white supremacist, we see him, and his image, as more important, and powerful, than our collective histories and identities in the process?

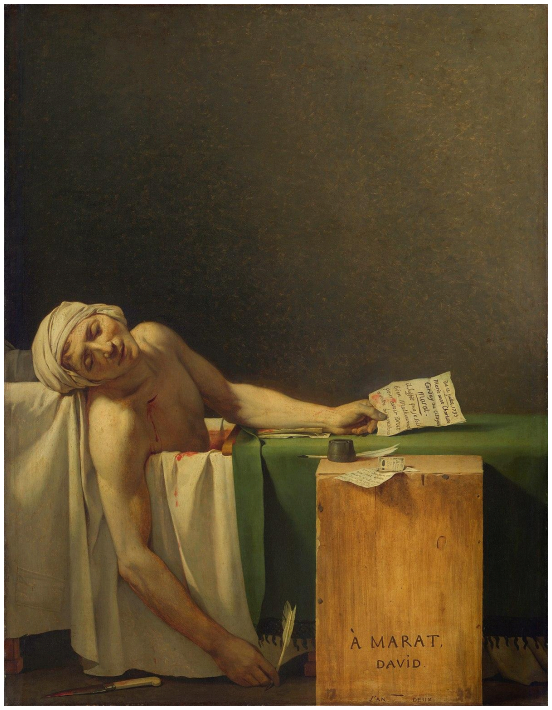
Painted by Caravaggio from 1603 to 1604, the biography he made of Italian common people contemporary in his time in relation to the biblical gospels continues to haunt the West until this day. At the time radical ventures, Caravaggio's signature techniques and continued cultural and historical relevance make it so reproductions of this biography of Jesus can be worth hundreds or thousands of visual biographies of dead presidents. In it, we can come to see the mastery of Caravaggio's own biographies, and elucidate what Nietzchze had to say on the nature of philosophy as a whole. Much like David's *Patroculus*, the men and women of Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ* are almost life sized giants, the man holding Jesus having feet and arms so full and heavy in tone even Jesus himself could weigh multiple men rather than the frailty of an Italian common man. Featuring Caravaggio's signature lighting technique, the man holding Jesus has had his elbow depicted in intense lighting to make it almost pop out of the painting itself. The many stages of grief can be depicted in the faces of the woman and men holding him. Follow the circular arc of the hands and people depicted here, from top right to Jesus' face, and we see at once the wonder of Caravaggio's visual storytelling and self-biography at play. The many bodies and faces form together into one set of motions depicting different reactions to Jesus' entombment, as the legs of the man in the front come to stand in for the legs of the women in the back as well. The nun's hand does the same, creating a visual metaphor for the many emotions and stages of grief all humankind passes through before death as each emotion is not only set in biography by Caravaggio's portraiture of the person, but because he could only express said emotions through the bodies and characters he chose to express them. The grief of a nun, after all, is different than the grief of a peasant woman, and the scream of a peasant woman is never the same as the care, shock, and reverence, of a man holding his friend

as he is being entombed. This fulfills the requirement of Nietzche's assertion about what it meant to be a philosopher:

"They all pose as though their real opinions had been discovered and attained through the self-evolving of a cold, pure, divinely indifferent dialectic (in contrast to all sorts of mystics, who, fairer and foolisher, talk of "inspiration"), whereas, in fact, a prejudiced proposition, idea, or "suggestion," which is generally their heart's desire abstracted and refined, is defended by them with arguments sought out after the event. [...]

It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy up till now has consisted of—namely, the confession of its originator, and a species of involuntary and unconscious auto-biography; and moreover that the moral (or immoral) purpose in every philosophy has constituted the true vital germ out of which the entire plant has always grown [...] In the philosopher, on the contrary, there is absolutely nothing impersonal; and above all, his morality furnishes a decided and decisive testimony as to WHO HE IS,—that is to say, in what order the deepest impulses of his nature stand to each other."

There is no truth in Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ* - simply the false truths, and series of confessions, about what Caravaggio decided to depict about what aspects of himself he saw in the people and emotions he hoped to depict. It is an autobiography of the highest form.

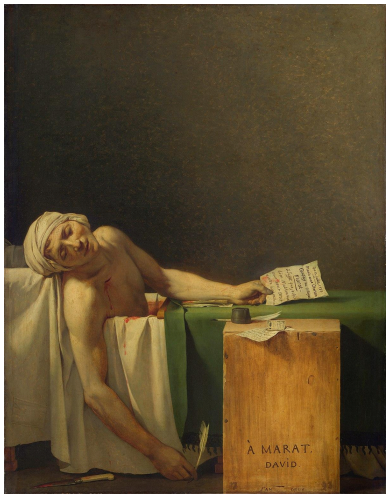


It is for the same reason that David decided to paint Marat - to give a biography of what he saw fit, and as necessary, to break free from the church and give freedom to a people through the prejudice of history. Rather than draw Marat in a Greek form, Marat is depicted somewhat sickly - he is pictured, in his humanity, not in his immortality, by drawing his body as less muscular, less like a homunculus, as men were depicted before during the age of Caravaggio. In doing so, David does not draw Marat he draws himself, the impulses and what he considers to be his nature in relation to the values of portraiture at the time. He does not paint Marat - he paints the necessity of breaking free from the church, and the mythology it had created for Jesus for the masses, through the simplicity, and meekness, of Marat's outstanding revolutionary spirit through his sickly body. A sickly man, Marat often took baths to quell the hives that would break out due to his chronic illness.

Biography, and its necessity, is at the heart of what was then and now is considered “history painting”. Paintings such as these were not simply displayed in French salons and galleries for the pleasure of the oligarchs of France - they were meant to be displayed publicly as well in the name of conveying the mythology of history to the public. Much like the symbolism of the Alexander Hamilton note, the sanctity of a nation can be summarized in an image. David, in this instance, was commissioned by the French government, a government which he eventually rebelled against and voted to destroy, to paint a Roman myth regarding two sets of brothers, the Horatii brothers from Rome, and the Curiatii brothers from Alba. Rather than go to war against one another, each of the cities sends three brothers from each family to decide the fate of either city. The three Roman brothers, shown on the leftmost side of the painting, take up arms against their three sisters, tied together between them by their father in between. Only one of the Horatii brothers survives; after his two siblings are murdered, he leads away the Curiatii brothers from Alba and slays them one by one. On returning home, the surviving brother sees his sister crying - she had been betrothed to one of the three Curiatii brothers slain. In the picture, it is this sister seen crying while sitting down. She wept before the battle knowing she was destined to lose one of her loved ones in the process. Upon seeing this, the remaining Horatii brother slays his sister, depicting his ultimate sacrifice to his civic pride, and in turn, what would later constitute the foundation of Western values, in the process. Memorialized through David’s artwork, and commissioned by the French government to emphasize the need for the French identity over lustful romances and interpersonal identities, David, in the name of France, would vote to kill the king 9 years later during the French revolution.

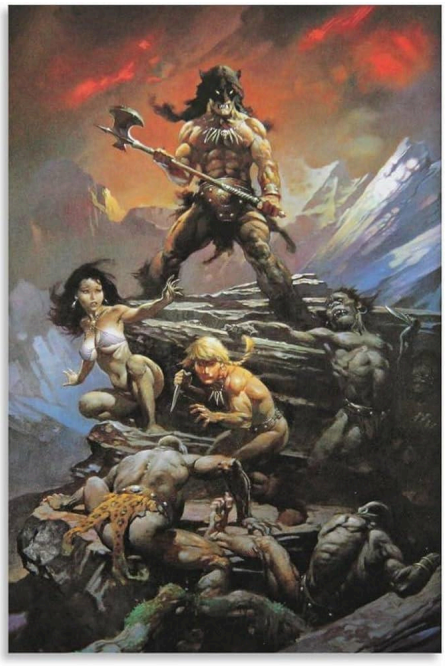
It is the same necessity of biography that has endured in the West through popular symbols such as Alex Ross' depictions of Superman in the late 1990s. Much like the three color clothing of the men and women in *Oath of the Horatii*, so too is simple contrast and contour used by Ross to eternalize contemporary American popular values through Superman, albeit this time through capitalism and popular culture rather than the whims of the state.

This process, of a nation's civic identity, was, after the creation of Superman but before his re-imagining by Ross, depicted by Andy Warhol in 1962 through his now infamous *Campbell's Soup Cans*. Lacking the grandiosity of the *Oath of the Horatii*, Andy's paintings reflect the mass consumption, and in turn, the biography of the American people, not through high art, but through the process of turning the manufacturing line into an art making process. Highlighting the ability for anyone in middle class America, regardless of origin, to buy the cans, the images speak to the totality of the American identity which allows for fame to be dispersed through mass consumption - in turn, taking an everyday object, and allowing anyone who then buys a campbell soup can to go into a celebrity's home and say, "I have one of those in my house too." Democratizing the sensation of fame, Warhol's work depicts the American's private identity being sacrificed for his consumer one, as the American capitalist consumption patterns, and the economic system they are based upon, form the civic sacrifice that the Horatii brothers laid down their lives for.

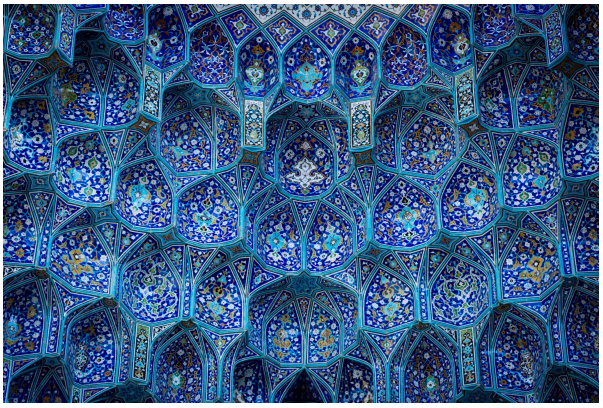


In turn, David was sent to “render Marat whole” - turn him into a celebrity, by reminding us of his status not as a homunculus, but as a man of his own accord, giving him eternal life in the process. Taking inspiration for Micheleangelo’s *Pietà*, Marat is drawn like Christ, giving him the religious iconography of Christ’s body, but at the same time, Marat has his mythological form taken away from him. He is as eternalized as Jesus, but forever trapped to the mortality Marat wished to give him, in turn, creating a new man, made in the image of man, and his worldly mortality, in the process.

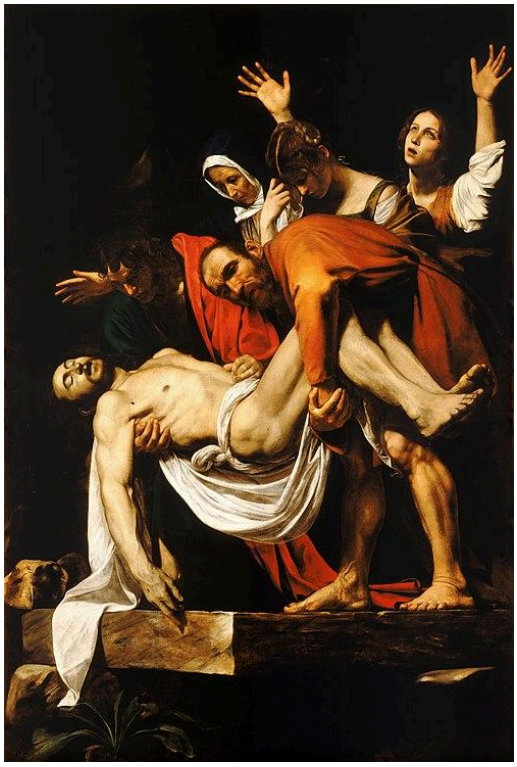
American commentators today wish for something of the same - looking for a reassurance of their identity, and morality, through a new biography of the American, and to a larger extent, Western, man. Identifying with past masculine descriptions, and seeing that younger women are simply rejecting the contemporary male figures young men are identifying with, men like Joe Rogan are looking for media to reflect the masculine ideals they want their children, and by that virtue, the next generation of American men to uphold.

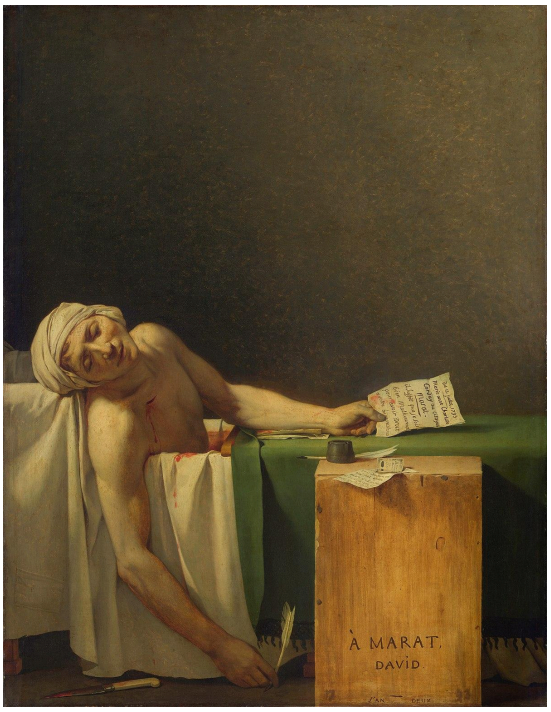


So-called “feminists” decry this kind of masculinity, the type pictured here by Frank Frazetta, despite themselves believing in it. The only difference between Frazetta, and the feminists who believe this depiction of masculinity is inherently immoral, is that Frazetta chooses to depict it through illustration - but the remnants of this masculinity are upheld, and live in the subconscious of, all so called feminists who fear it.

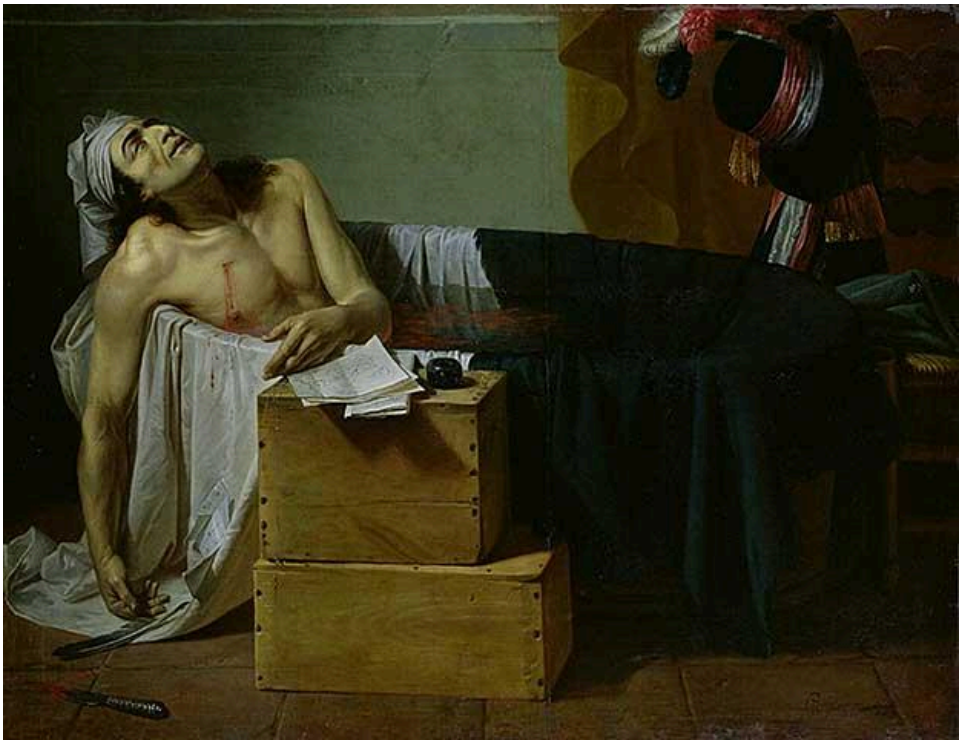


Islam outlaws visual biography of this sort altogether for this reason, fearing that the biography of man by man will interfere with God's plans for him. Instead, women are asked to veil themselves for this reason, so man does not impose his gaze, and by that virtue, his biography of the women he lusts over, onto the women who are gazed upon.





This means that in the case of Marat, Marat is returned whole, not simply through David's gaze, but through the gaze of the artists and painters that came before him. The jutting out of the elbow that creates an invitation into the painting through Jesus' chest on the right side is not recreated in Marat's work - Marat, through David's brush, is not granted the holy light of resurrection through artistry. Instead, Marat is kept dead, a symbol of martyrdom in the secular sense, so that unlike Jesus' death, he may simply be seen as a human martyr, not a divine one, ushering in the French revolution, and modern painting, in a single stroke. Rather than have a man die for the sins of all men, Marat dies for the sins of a revolution, eternalizing him in his mortality, and single place in history, rather than religious eternity.



The Death of Marat, in this instance, is not simply a biology of a body, or a reflection of the self, through portraiture. Pictured here is the same biography, the same event, but done through the zeitgeist of the contemporary painting norms. His room is full, the block that depicts depth in David's work matched by an equally full background that symbolized the whole of Marat's life, rather than capture his body' stillness in depth. Rather than clutter the room with items and biographies of still objects that reflected Marat's life, David's Marat is simply left to wade in his bathtub dead separated from the heavy muscularity Roques chose to depict him through.

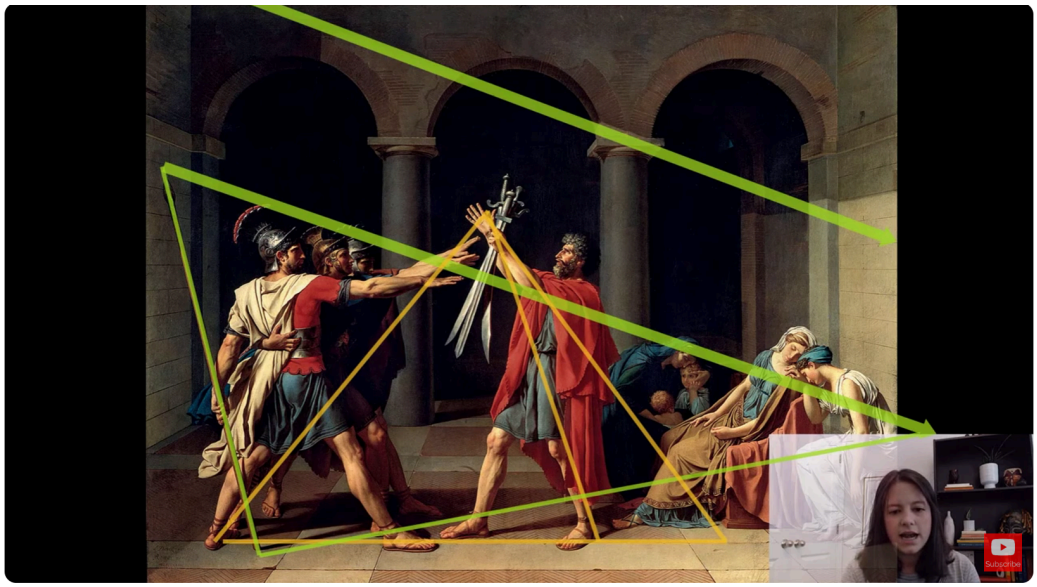
Instead, we get this image, one that, much like Jesus' contour in Caravaggio's work, has Marat and his linens blend together, the pure greens and light whites of linen tapestry serving as a point of harmony for the work's composition. His body is reflected and drapes out in beauty through the simplicity of the linen, a further example of how David chose to make Marat, unlike the previous legacy of Western painting, a man light in weight, and more human to the eye in stature. The contour previously mentioned to make him reflect Jesus in his mother's arms rears its head once more as we are reminded of Jesus as the world's eternal martyr, this time not through the mythology of him conveyed, and upholding, the supremacy of the church and state, but in its complete rejection of it.

The final item of question, the one that draws us into the work and is more visible in person, is the note he holds in his hand during his moments of death. Written by his assassin, Charlotte Corday, it reads: "July 13, 1793. Marie Anne Charlotte Corday to Citizen Marat. It is enough that I am very unhappy to be entitled to your benevolence." Enacting revenge on him on behalf of the crown, there were no spectators, no mythological servants of God to capture, as Caravaggio did in Jesus' entombment, Marat's final moments. Instead, all that is left on the table in front of Marat's bath is a bill to represent the French court which abstracted, through paper bills, land, into money.

At the same time that the French revolution was taking place, so too were French painters immortalizing the struggle of African men looking to free themselves from French colonial rule. While that struggle continues until this day, as the descendents of Haitian slaves have still yet to be granted access to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness in their own country, it was this man of Senegalese origin, Jean-Baptiste Belley, who in 1791, alongside his comrades in Saint-Dominique, incited the French Revolution through slave rebellions in said island. A symbol of freedom for all men, he was the first fully black man in the French National Convention, helping to outlaw slavery alongside Frenchmen in France in 1794. Despite his efforts, the slave owning generals of the Caribbean fought against this ruling - he died, in a French prison, having never fully seen his vision, only allowed to be eternalized in portraiture when upheld against the white French abolitionist Guillaume Raynal. The question here is not one of otherness, as art historians may want you to believe, but rather, that of who is considered French enough to be declared as being entitled to be immortalized as a symbol of liberty. For it was not that Belley was simply an extension of Raynal's values, but of all men, regardless of origin, as a whole.

The struggle for a unified French identity continued into the 19th century, eternalized by the sinking of the French frigate, named Medusa, in 1816. Setting sail alongside 3 other boats to Senegal's shores hoping, with the leadership of a recently returned French royal exile named De Chaumareys, to reclaim Senegal back from the British after the signing of the Treaty of Paris by both empires. Running aground on a sandbank off the coast of West Africa, in large part due to the incompetence of De Chaumareys' inexperience in sailing - he had only been given the position through nepotism and political favors. Quickly forming a raft, the surviving members of the ship not deemed worthy of lifeboats were left to drift at sea as they succumbed to madness, killing and eating one another as only 146 men and women of the lower classes of French life were left on the raft that had split off from the boat's wreckage. De Chaumarey had ordered to cut the raft loose from the rest of the lifeboats towing it to safety. They were found 13 days later - only 15 of the men and women had survived. A metaphor for the corruption that would plague the new French state to come, the promise of true liberty was still far away from what David would have hoped for his people. Taking inspiration from the book written by two of the raft's survivors, Gericault took the practice of history painting and submerged the principles by which it had been created, taking a massacre of the civility of French values and turning it into a salon spectacle by which the French aristocracy would see the fate of their new nation. Showing a Haitian man on the top right hand side of the painting's climatic mass of bodies, Gericault chose to immortalize the struggle for freedom in France through a Haitian man, showing off French virtues through his inclusion, rather than forego, the subject of colonization, and the expansion of freedom for the citizens of those colonies altogether.

History painting, which at this point continued to be the highest form of art in the French academy, was often only relegated to celebrating the successes of the French nation, or the civic values it wished to instill. Rather than, as in the Oath of the Horatii, there was no familial or clan identity to be sacrificed in the name of France - rather, the bodies aboard the raft become a horde like mass of corpses and sickly mythologized Greek forms that come together to represent the people and lower classes of France sacrificed during the corrupt reign post 1816.



Oath of the Horatii by David | A Neoclassical Masterpiece

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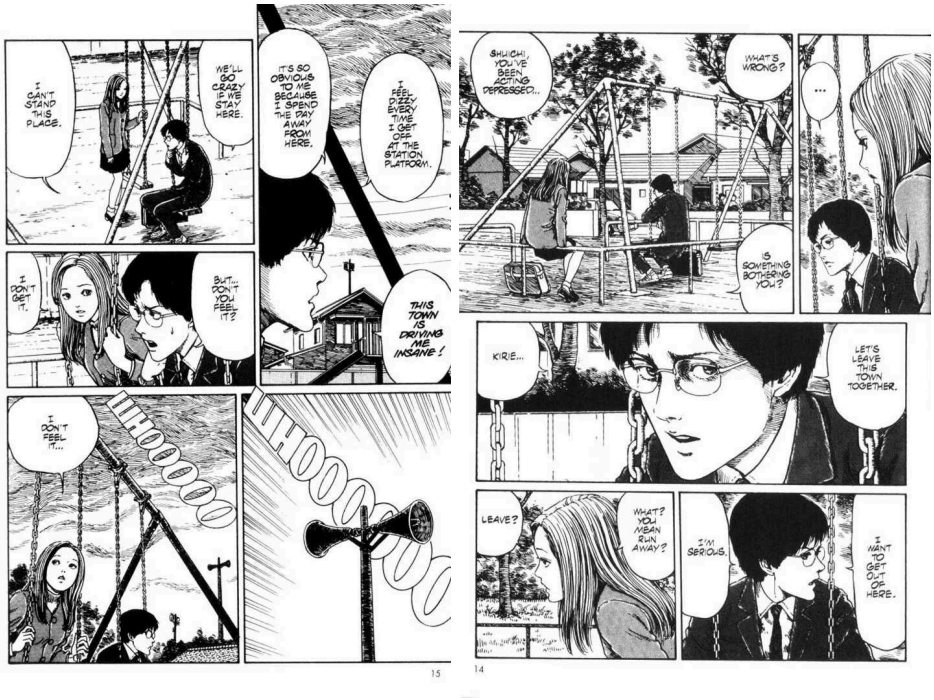
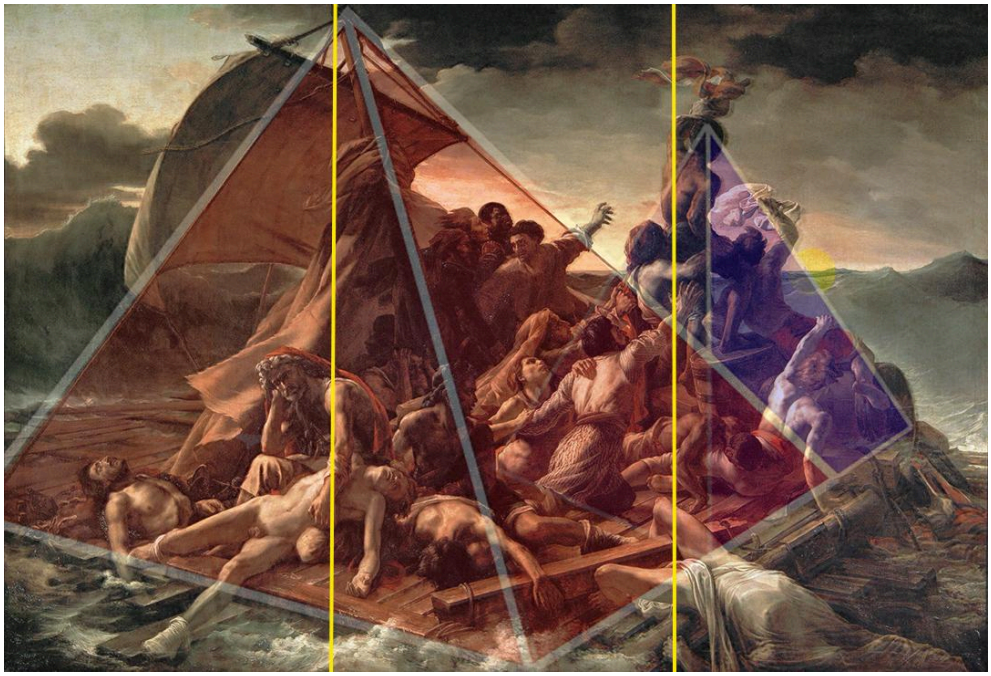
At the heart of both *Oath of the Horatii* and *The Raft of the Medusa* are pictorial traditions that emphasize geometry as the foundation of tension in illustration. Notice here the use of triangles, and the pyramids they create, in *Oath of the Horatii*, as a way by which to create tension between both opposing parties in the folk story. Tension is created through the use of lighting emanating from the right hand side of the image, drawing a direct line between the colored in, almost comic book like outlines of David's masterpiece. In addition to this tension lies the stability of the father in the center of the picture, dividing it neatly, alongside the columns in the background, into three fragmented stanzas, each one joined together by an unbroken contour line around the bodies and the tension created in the legs of either masculine party: brothers or father. In doing so, David crafts tension inside the image by keeping bodies proportional to one another in relation to the morality of the characters inside the original folk story.


I CAN'T STAND THIS PLACE.
WE'LL GO CRAZY IF WE STAY HERE.
I DON'T GET IT.
BUT... DON'T YOU FEEL IT?
I DON'T FEEL IT...
IT'S SO OBVIOUS TO ME BECAUSE I SPEND THE DAY AWAY FROM HERE.
I FEEL DIZZY EVERY TIME I GET OFF AT THE STATION PLATFORM.
THIS TOWN IS DRIVING ME INSANE!
WHOOOO
WHOOOO
SHUICHI, YOU'VE BEEN ACTING DEPRESSED...
WHAT'S WRONG?
...
IS SOMETHING BOTHERING YOU?
KIRIE...
LET'S LEAVE THIS TOWN TOGETHER.
LEAVE?
WHAT? YOU WANNA RUN AWAY?
I'M SERIOUS.
I WANT TO GET OUT OF HERE.
15
14

This, of course, has continued into the contemporary age, as modern mangaka in Japan have, in many ways, taken over for the artistic practices in the West. Here, in Itou's Uzumaki, we can see a similar process, albeit this time, one that uses geometry and composition not in the static sense, to create visual tension of out of form alone, as done in *Oath of the Horatii*, but instead in to facilitate the movement of the eye across the page. Beginning and read from top right to bottom left, and then beginning in the top right panel once more of the second page, we can see how Itou masterfully crafts tension, and visual rhythm, through his composition and paneling. The girl, looking down, stares at her boyfriend, only for the grass in the background of the first panel to lead us through into the second one through the swingset in the next image as the town comes into view. From here, the frontmost pole of the swingset leads us down into the next panel halfway through the page where the man seen here plants the tension of the novel with a gaze: the need to leave town. His face completes a full turn in the lower right hand panel one last time as his girlfriend's gaze leads us directly into the next page. From here, the swingset is used in the same way again, drawing us from panel to panel as the text that reads "WHOOOOO" lies in direct parallel with the man's neck in the previous panel. Keeping this parallel, the final panel sets up the next page like the last page did for this one.

This Western tradition has continued into the 21st century through the works of Manga artists like Araki, creator of Jojo's Bizarre Adventure, as well. Picture here is him using Michelangelo's work, alongside European fashion magazines, to draw and illustrate the characters of his novels. Most recently gaining notoriety as a manga artist that collaborated with the likes of Gucci and other European fashion houses, his dedication to artistic integrity through the European masters have gained him worldwide acclaim, both with the academy and the general public. Take a close look at Caravaggio's Bacchus, and then again to his work, and you will find the beautiful blending of the manga tradition Hokusai laid out mixing with the European portraiture of the West.



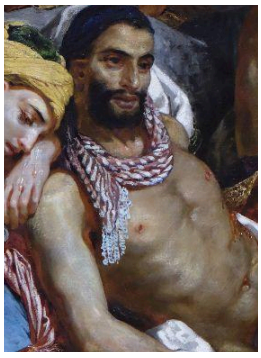
The raft of the Medusa is no different: here, tension is created in the static form, requiring of the massive artwork, zoomed in to give the viewer an up close and personal perspective of the ordeal, two pyramids to reflect the shifting fates of the French republic. On the left hand side, the sail of the raft is seen pushing it towards an incoming wave ready to destroy the common French people aboard it. On the right hand side, tension is created in contrast to the rightmost pyramid through the inclusion of the Haitian man aboard the raft, waving a set of robes akin to the French flag as he looks to a ship in the horizon he hopes to save the raft of the Medusa, highlighted here by a yellow dot. The shifting winds of liberty blow through the image, leaving its spectators, the French aristocracy that gathered to view the image at their opulent salons, to decide the fate of its inhabitants through the actions that the painting would inspire them to undertake.

To prepare himself for the process of painting the work, Gericault took immense steps in securing the necessary materials for depicting the dead as he saw fit. He spent time at morgues analyzing, drawing, and painting decomposing and rotting body parts - he even went so far as to paint a head, over weeks, watching it compose. Taking these bodies, and unlike David, painting them in the Western tradition, Gericault finds a harmony between giving a mythological and hypermuscular volume to them while keeping them intact in our minds as decayed aspects of corpses. In doing so, he highlights both aspects of the human form - the expression found only in adding highlights to the volume of muscles in his works, while at the same time, using the contour and coloring of corpses to highlight the tone and depth, through color palette, of the emotion he is trying to convey.

This means, in the case of the grandiosity of *The Raft of the Medusa*, Gericault holds no bars when choosing to, in contrast with Caravaggio's *The Entombment of Christ*, not create thick contour between bodies and figures that highlight each individual character's personality, and identity, within the confines of the color put on top of them. Instead, through color harmony and the blurring of skin tones, vis a vis the decaying of skin color through the flesh, the singular bodies of the raft form a homunculus-like mass rather than individual characters alone. Starting from the lower left corner, these masses write and convulse together in a swinging motion, forming an arc towards the Haitian man raising his fist in a celebration of victory, and prosperity, as he gives the rest of the raft a sign of hope with a ship looming on the horizon. The same contours and body postures given to Christ in renaissance painting, as was in Marat's body, litter the raft, where Christ's absence is notable, as its inhabitants, instead of reaching out and crying over Christ's body, reach out in a secular fashion towards the prospect of liberty. Bodies are seen mutilated and left victims of cannibalism across it, each one a failed eucharist for those seeking to indulge in sin over the promise that the French government had created for them through Christ. The final glimpse of humanity lies in the Frenchman, holding to the promise of salvation by being grasped by the Haitian standing in the name of liberty, atop the single barrel remaining on the raft.

3 years later, the fight to be freed from colonization continued as 2 generals from the Haitian revolution, depicted here by French painter Guillon, in 1822. Guillon, a man of mixed French and Caribbean descent, dedicated the painting to the Haitian government in order to promote the right for Haiti's independence. Later on declared a bastard child by the French government, Guillon never was able to fully reconcile his mixed French identity having been born from a slave mother and a professional white Frenchman. Continuing in the long tradition of raising the question of who is French, and who deserves freedom, the men pictured here are still in French garb, and being granted nobility, and prosperity, by a white French God. It is this God that traces them back to Europe, where, despite having been the origin of their enslavement, their new identities as Haitians was set to be enacted. It is through these same values that Haitians wished to enact their own freedom upon themselves, when, in 1801, Toussaint L'Ouverture stated that Haitians should thank God for the gift of freedom - it is, after all, their choice to believe in Him. The chains of slavery are cast down at the feet of the generals as both men, on either side, in civic Western tradition, take on oath over the words written on the stela between them: "Freedom, Religion, Laws, and Constitution", "Live Free or Die", and "Strength through Unity". Nevertheless, the question of whether or not French depictions of these generals, and the necessity of them to be made in the image of white Frenchmen, looms at large.

Guillon himself was no stranger to French civic pride; an illustrious history painter himself, his work, *The Fatherland in Danger* from 1799, shows the painting conventions of the time more stereotypically. Again, we see men and women depicted here in stark contour and contrast to one another; bodies, unlike on the raft of the Medusa, rarely ever form together into one, instead each character its own strong, still, static and stiff version of a romanticized form. The colors and images of the Oath of the Horatti present themselves once more as men reach out to give Roman solutes and swords are raised in unison to represent civic duty and nobility. Here, France, represented by the statue on the leftmost side, is not represented by the fatherland, but the motherland, as the word is gendered feminine in French - the scene is littered with characters and moments, such as the lover's embrace, the child bearing swords, or the military men pointing to the river in the background to invoke a scene of civic pride and identity through portraiture.



It is through this perspective that we can come to fully understand the impact of Delacroix's, a student of David, Marat's key biographer, depiction of the massacre at Chios. More than four meters tall, the massive opulence of the painting is like an Aegan epic in scale, akin to a Ridley Scott movie of today's age depicting similar struggles for Western identity. Featuring a dual pyramid structure seen before in the raft of the Medusa, the nature of the West's

so called “white” European identity is seen in the totality of its hypocrisy through this historical depiction. Instantly controversial, many famous art critics and artists alike decried the painting for the destruction of the aesthetic practice they believed they saw. Bodies, depicted again in the ideal Greek form, are not painted with thick contours as before, but instead through blurred red lines that cast shadows on the body, making it more reminiscent of a medieval painting than a Greek epic eternalized through portraiture.

The historical event itself caused a political panic in the French world as its identity was called into question in one fell swoop. The Greek people, out of whom the Western world and the European empires saw themselves as belonging to, were being massacred by the darkskin Muslim Ottoman Empires of what they considered the Eastern world. To save the Greek people, in the name of protecting the Western identity, would then be said to fight against an Empire that, much like the West, promoted slavery, and looked to enslave and sell Greek women and children into Harems and sexual slavery, amongst other practices. The men and women depicted here, however, unlike the Frenchmen created in mythological tone in historical paintings founded on Greek and Roman art, were not depicted as such - instead, the mixed race identity that the contemporary Greek world inhabited was shown on full display. Much like the previous depiction of France in Guillon’s painting, vignettes of the massacre are displayed as in the background, between both sets of triangular forms, the man on the left and the soldier on the right, the massacre can be seen from afar. This is in direct contrast to the conventions of history painting at the time, where the entirety of the work was filled to its utmost capacity with individual scenes and archetypes of what was considered the totality of the French identity, as seen in *The Fatherland in Danger*. Rather than a scene of civic heroism, Delacroiz paints the agony of a people without a savior, much like the Frenchmen killed and left to die on the *Raft of the Medusa* half a decade before. Contours in between fingers covered in tears seen in the middle picture blend the hands' individual features to form weblike outlines in between them, making it seem as if she could wade through water with them. The Greeks, unlike the Turks massacring them, were depicted as feeble, while the Turks heroic - calling into question the nature of Western values through slavery and empire. For one last time, the Greeks, and their supposed immortality, as it was through Marat, was called into question - could such a disgruntled, and groveling people, really be any different than the French peasantry, or slaves, the crown decided to distance itself from?

This question, and gap, would eventually be answered, and slowly closed, by the work of Courbet's *A Burial at Ornans*. Another titan of a work, measuring 3 meters by 6 meters, Courbet, when asked to commission a painting on Christianity for the French salons stated:

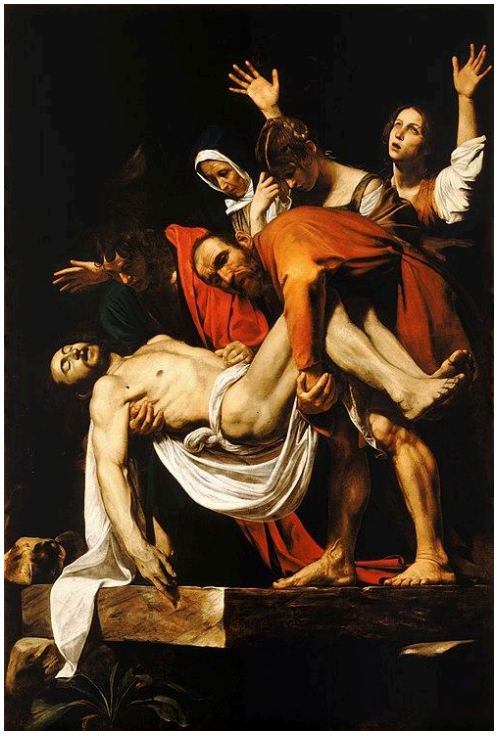
"I have never seen angels. Show me an angel and I will paint one."

Taking Christianity as a practice, rather than a propaganda system, Courbet chose to, rather than, as Caravaggio did, paint peasantry and common folk as angels and saints themselves, instead show the effects of the sacrament, and its practices, on the 95% of the French population that lived in the countryside of the empire's borders. The king, recently overthrown, and slavery alongside it, ushered in "realism" into French painting, a practice by which the reality of the French people, living in rural France, could be displayed.

To further elucidate this, this would be akin to painters of today's El Salvador or United States painting, in Christian ritual, or through American ritual pastimes of sports outings, the common people of the country. While it may be tempting to re-imagine the people of Courbet's burial as timeless, virginal artifacts of European nobility, in that moment, they were closer to what today we would think of as the descendents of Native Americans in Latin America, or the masses of those vulgarly referred to as rednecks in the United States.

Courbet was no stranger to this, and neither were his contemporaries. Paintings such as this one, around 2 by 2 and a half meters, displayed still lives of the common folk of France and their lifestyles.

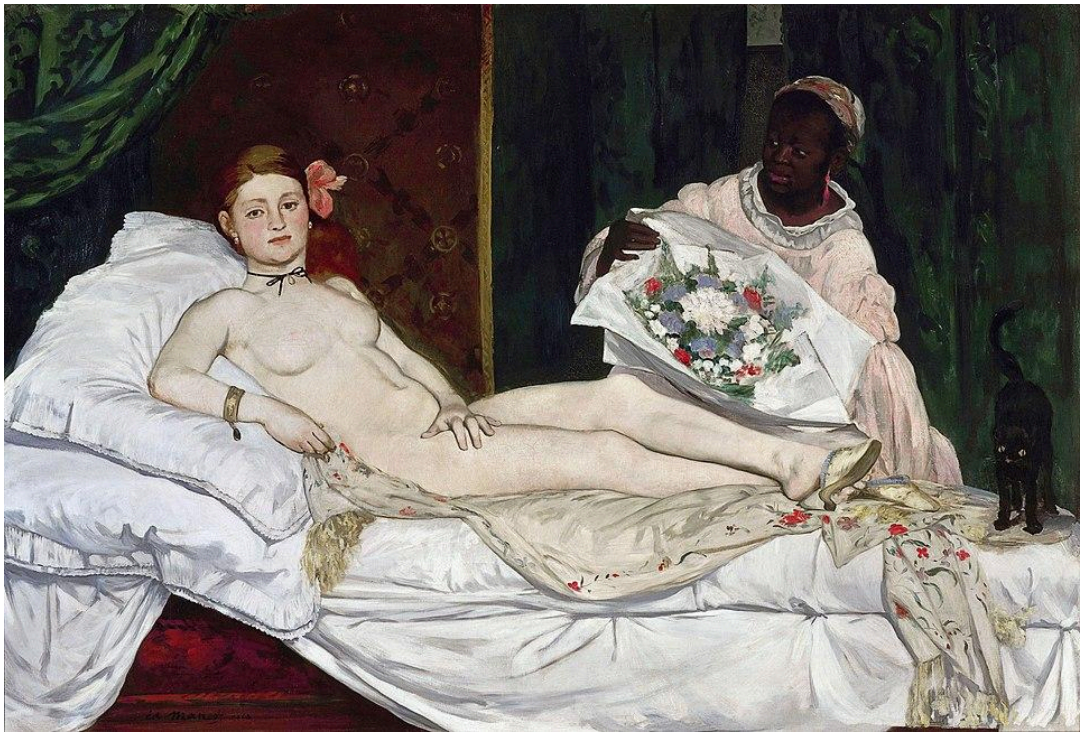
Rather than be epitomized by history painting, and its morals, these common folk instead had, as art, popular art prints such as the ones pictured here. Made with simply wood blocks and basic color blocking techniques, these low art, and low technique, depictions of morals and French life matched the color blocking techniques of neoclassical works like *The Oath of the Horatii*, both in virtues and values. Pictured here is one such work, depicting the span of a man and woman's life throughout time. At the leftmost side are two French peasants in adolescence, depicted here growing and aging throughout time from birth to death in relation to God, Christ, and Hell underneath. His ascension in life is reflected by his social and civic responsibilities, until, like all men, he is condemned in his last moments by an angel and Satan to convey his sins and good fortunes alongside his wife to God almighty above. Social life, and Christian attitudes, can then be said, could not be held separate for the French people - they were intertwined as the civic and the spiritual were reflections of the same aspects of society.



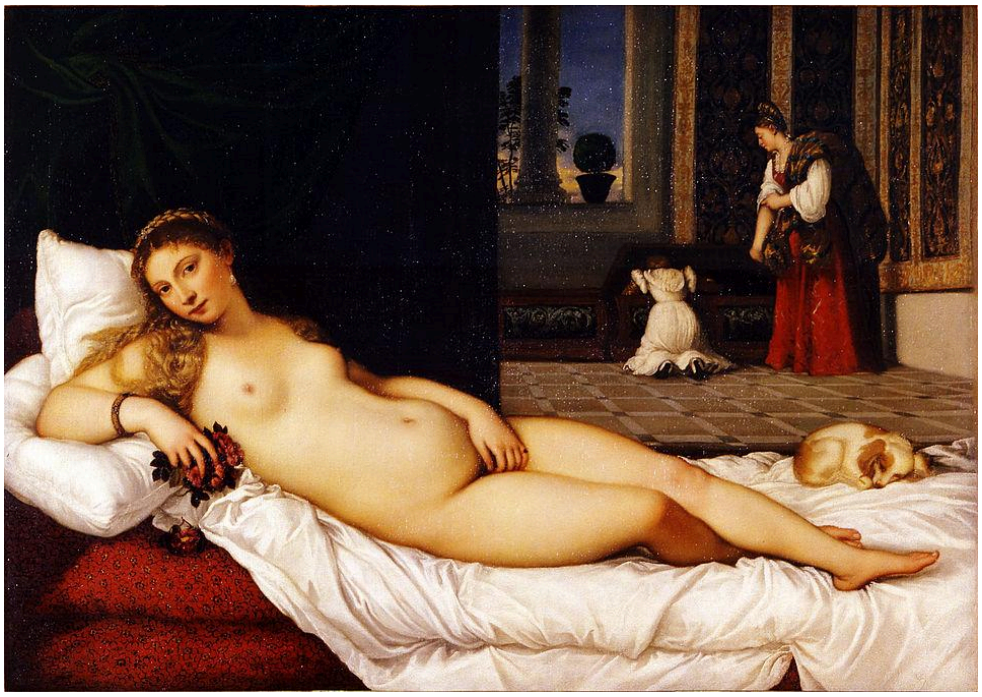
This in turn gives us the complete history of the evolution of Christiniaty in the West, and in portraiture, as a whole. Christ, on the left, was reimagined controversially through the faces and bodies of common folk by Caravaggio, to instill Christ's teachings, and his tragedy, in them. Courbet, however, foregoes this, instead depicting what Christianity meant, and for many people continues to mean: ritual, that while giving identity to a people, is also, at times, disdained by them. Much like in the Oath of the Horatii, so too is the picture segregated by gender: the body being buried does not itself matter - unlike in the entombment of Christ. Instead, much like the father who split the Horatii clan into gendered parts, so too do the red grab of the church officials divide the men and women between those who bring that is to be mourned, and those who

mourn. Completely draped in black cloaks, the women, and the majority of participants, have their bodies cloaked from the mythology of the Greek form - instead, in those forms' absence, only faces are left, and the direction the face, to convey the mood and ambience of the *Burial at Ornans*. As opposed to the dramatic expressions by Caravaggio, the people at the funeral of Ournans have expressions mixing from grief to apathy - Christianity is not a real vector by which to, as the church elite in red have, enter elite society. Instead of depicting civic duty, and the blending of the spiritual and civic life, Courbet depicts the mundanity of Christian ritual, in a sense, negating the basic principles of history painting in the process. The two men at the front of the work, on the right hand side of the procession, were stated by Courbet to be members of the revolution of '93, standing alongside their dogs in the clothes of their times. Relic of a false war, these men returned to their countryside victors of their homeland, still relegated to the same Christian practices, beliefs, and church doctrine of before. The women, blending in together to form a cloak of grief in all black, move away from the procession in the process, as Jesus is brought to the peasantry on a cross and the solemnity of French ritual life in the countryside is captured not in bodies, but in reflecting, flicked faces and expressions that move the image along with their sorrow. Piety, seen here, is not a symptom of grandiose churches and their depictions of Christ, but rather found, as it was the case, in the processions of burials, the moment at which a family mourned the fate of their loved one, free to worry if he would make it into heaven.

France, quickly modernizing soon afterwards, would find itself building a new Paris under the leadership of its new emperor, Napoleon III, during the second French empire. Looking to catapult his empire's capital into the new age, with the city's expansion would come new arts movements, marking, through shifts in technology, a new age of Western portraiture that more accurately reflects the so-called "freedom of expression" and "freedom of abstraction" seen in modern art today. Beginning in 1852, the slums of France, seen pictured on the leftmost side, where dark corners and alleyways elbowed against sharp and jagged buildings like the contour of mountainside rain water, the new France would be founded with the freedom of movement in mind, taking inspiration from the United States' Washington D.C. The long, organized corridors, free for the free travel of carriages, empowered by the advent of steel, opened up the possibility to clear out slums for French aristocracy, in turn, pushing the urban poor of France out into the neighboring, soon to be built, suburbs.



It is in this context that this painting, Olympia, was painted. Originally facing rejection at the French salon the year it was set to be exhibited, fearing criticism of censorship, it was allowed in by the Academy. A jarring work, its composition pays homage to previous themes of nudes and sensuality that, much like Marat, sought to make the experience of otherness, brought about by sex and the male gaze, comfortably close to the men of the salon.



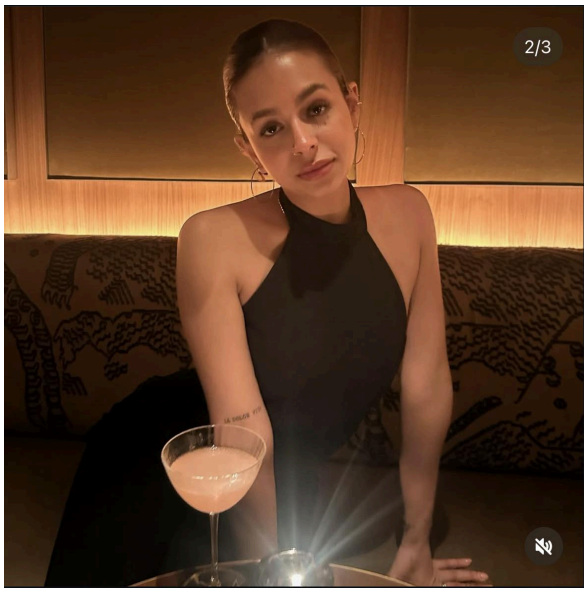
It is the male gaze that defined the portraiture of women for centuries, even if many women today admire and enjoy pictures of women drawn by men for this reason. Titian's famous *Venus of Urbino* is most often displayed amongst the finest of all the classical nudes, the hair of said Venus, the personification of lust, romance, and the chaos she incurs alongside Mars, her repeated lover, so silky in representation it is possible to almost hear it softly drape over the Venus' shoulders. Much like David's Marat her body alone illuminates half the painting, her coy and dainty smile receptive to the male gaze as she invites you into her body through her turnt neck and relaxed, pushed back left shoulder. The sensuality of her body follows its topmost contour, leading you past her pelvis towards the puppy on her bed sheet whose hair and sheen is as much of a symbol of cuteness, meant to be consumed, as her body and gaze itself. From here, alongside with her eyes and neck beckoning towards her background, she not only invites you into her eroticism, but into her splendor as well - enter the world of the Venus of Urbino, Titian beckons, and you will enter into a world of riches, of women servants, of Italian opulence, boat most of all, you will devour the roses she grasps alongside her other hand covering what you must desire. Let her pearl drop earring, Titian beckons, drape over your own face, fall onto your cheek as a teardrop would roll down it, so you may, in turn, become part of the splendor *Urbino*, through its Venus, promises.

It is this same fantasy promised, as well, one built on the privacy of man, and his relation to woman, that not only beckons us into Titian's Venus, but is at the heart of the pastoral fantasy he depicts in his 1509 *The Pastoral Concert* as well. Here, the men's gazes are kept firmly away from us as the women in the image come to depict mother nature herself; their reflects nothing of women's lived experiences or realities, but rather, the musings, and machinations of women, that exist only in men's minds. Turning her body towards us, the woman in the front of the image, at the leftmost side, pours water into a marble basin, reflecting the plentitude of the female nude and the fantasies the male psyche attributes to her. The men, disguised through their gazes and conversations with one another, are free to use these women as they see fit, use them as part of their own plans, in privacy, away from the judgement of the spectator.

Manet, taking inspiration from Titian, and the European practice of pastoral landscape, depicts the same scene, albeit this time, with the privacy afforded to the two men before removed. In its absence, we can see the discomfort of the man in brown, looking outward at he who gazes the scene with disdain, as he tries to imply to the spectator to leave him, and his male friend, as they try to swoon the muses in the scene with their intellect. The men wish to impose their egos onto the muses, the frontmost of whom looking back in serenity, and innocence outwardly, inviting in whosoever wishes to consume from her cornucopia of plenty. In the background is seen another woman, who, much like the frontmost, is created and consumed by the male gaze, her femininity an offering to those who, made in the eyes of Manet, find her feminine aura an object of desire.

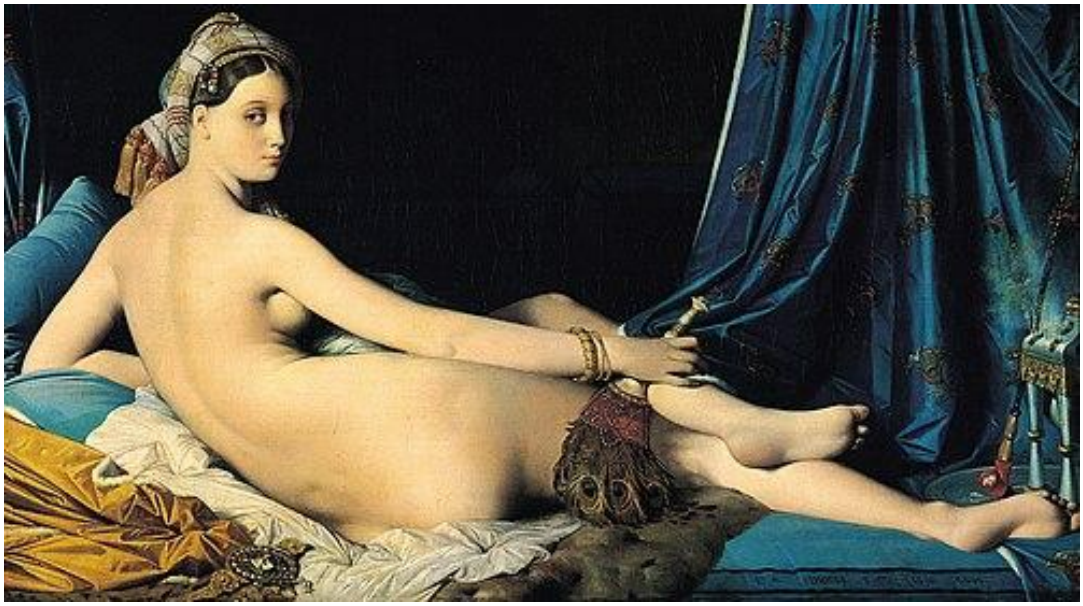
Painted in the same year, and the painting most often held against Manet's Olympia, is Cabanel's *The Birth of Venus*. Drawing direct inspiration from Michelangelo's works, the Venus here is so highly eroticized that her body itself expresses orgastic pleasure, at once displaying the tension and release of it at the same time. What is important to note here is that this is not an image, nor a biography, of a woman, or of a woman's femininity. Rather, it is an expression of Cabanel's eroticism through a female body, and what is referred to as, rather than simply a form, the female nude.

Pictured here is something akin to a female nude, but not what the art academy would consider as such. Rather than eroticize and express emotion, allure, and desire, through the nudity of woman alone, this image, seen as lower art, is instead relegated to the status of smut, or porngraphy. Failing to capture within its form a sublimation of knowledge or emotion, instead, this image, created solely for the visual appeal of the female body, is relegated as lower art, smut, or more akin to pornography than a female nude.



In many ways, the contemporary self portraiture of women continues to be trapped within the confines of the poses, and forms, that illustrators and advertisers created for other men - they exist within the fantasies men made for other men about women. Despite this, cultural taboos ensure that this type of self-biography, made in the image of men, exists by and large for the female audiences of the friends of women such as the one pictured here. In turn, it means images like this, made in the image, and legacy, of the male gaze, are today re-appropriated to cater to the female gaze instead.

It is this so-called female gaze, and the burden that it carries, that is at the heart of the controversy, and male hatred, for Lena Dunham's girls. Showing sex, and by that virtue, pornography, through the female gaze, Lena Dunham ensures that sex is shown, as most women experience it, as the slavery of women to cater to men's insecurity through sex. Rather than, as in pornography, where women, their bodies, and actions, are catered and offered up for the men making and watching their domination through video, Dunham caters not to the male gaze of the viewer, by making the men whose insecurities she quells through sex alpha hyper masculine forms of male masculinity, but instead, by showing the kind of weak, insecure men, who need the fantasy of pornography fulfilled in real life through her body, and dominion over it, through sex. By showing women's submission to man, but subverting the need for an ideal masculine form in depictions of sex, the female nude, or pornography, Dunham caters to the women who clean up for this insecurity in the process.

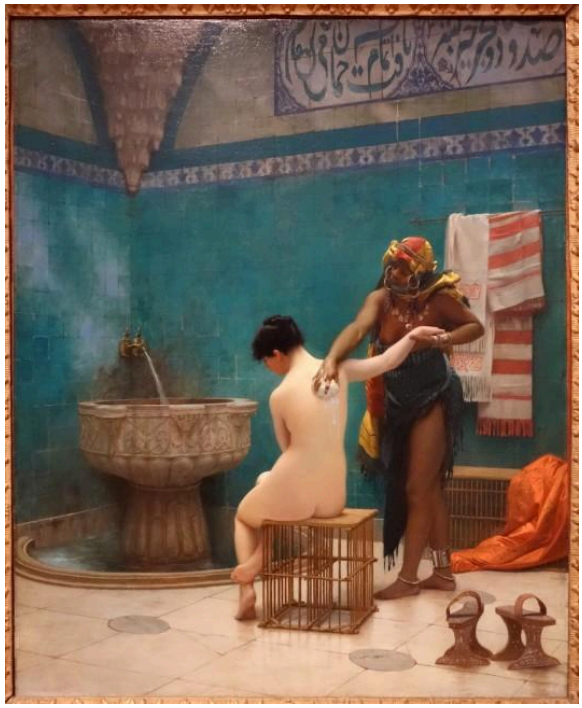


On this practice in portraiture, John Berger wrote:

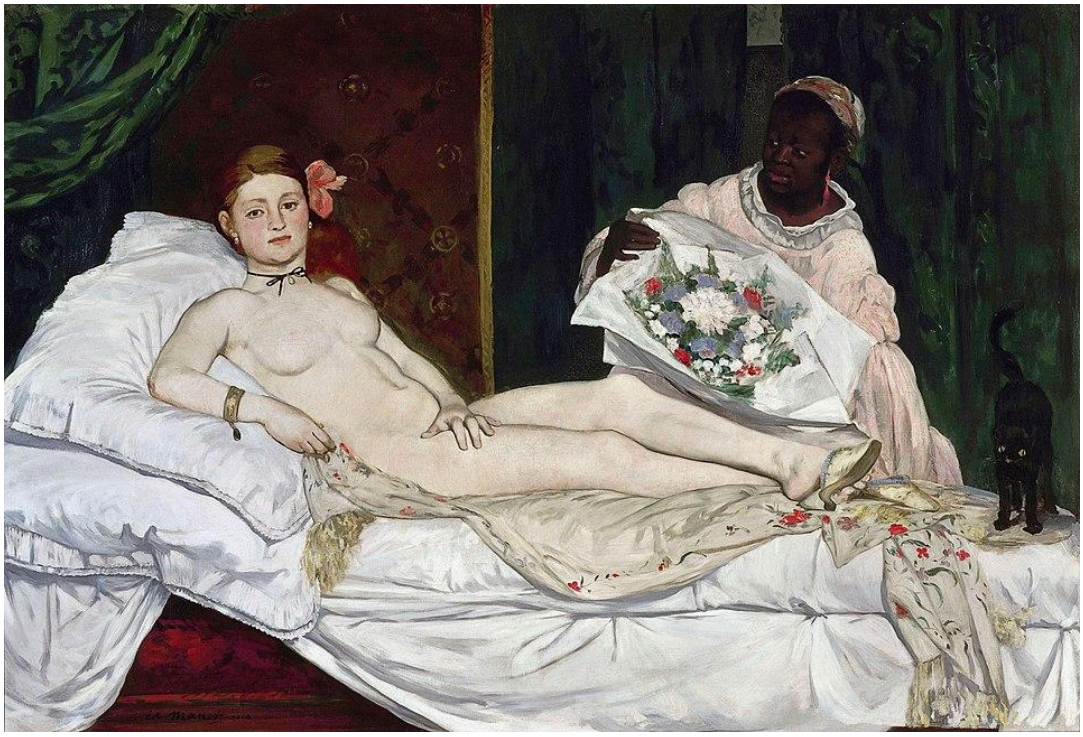
"This picture is made to appeal to his sexuality. It has nothing to do with her sexuality. [...] It is the expression of a woman responding with calculated charm to the man whom she imagines looking at her - although she doesn't know him. She is offering up her femininity as the surveyed. [...] Men of state, of business, discussed under paintings like this. When one of them felt he had been outwitted, he looked up for consolation. What he saw reminded him that he was a man."

Seen here is a female nude taken from Algiers, one that mythologizes the white female form to cater to the needs of man as Berger described. Her back is artificially elongated, turning back to depict a false form of a woman that beckons and lures man in with its sensuality, asserting his masculinity, and power, in the process.

Delacroix, who painted the Massacre at Chios years before, was no stranger to this - he often depicted harems of muslim and Algerian women, and as Frenchmen did at the time, their black female servants and counterparts, in the process.



Orientalism, can then be said, to be the practice by which Frenchmen, and other European kingdoms, cast their own fantasies, and ideals of opulence and beauty, onto the cultures of what they considered the “East” - even if Delacroix’s *Massacre at Chios* highlights the hypocrisy of this term and label altogether. Seen here is another white nude, its serenity upheld against her black servant, painted in the half nude, as the privacy and luxury of the white nude grants it allure that the black nude, depicted in working attire, does not.



It is within this tension, that of the white nude, and the French identity's reliance on it, that Manet, parodying Titian's Venus, depicted in *Olympia*. Unveiled by Manet's friend Zacherie Astruc, the man introduced the painting to the world with this poem:

"When tired of dreaming, Olympia awakens / Spring enters on the arms of the mild black messenger / She is the slave who, like the amorous night / Comes to adorn with flowers the day beautiful to behold / The august young woman is whom ardor is ever wakeful."

Seen here is a white nude, albeit not in the traditional sense - the contours of its body, and the detail of the hand painted, have been put together in such a way that the nude does not cater to a man's ideal of eroticism. Subverting the idea of the "servant" woman, Olympia, the white woman in this painting, is a high class prostitute. Subverting the notions of servitude, it is the black woman in this painting who is granted privacy, and in turn, authority over her body, as Olympia is relegated to cater to the men who wish to consume her through portraiture. Instead of highlighting her breasts and nipples, Olympia's form and body are muted throughout as it is the now freed slave woman who is less of a commodity than the white Frenchwoman who Frenchmen claimed to adore. Bringing in flowers that, wrapped in newspaper, speak to the fact that Olympia's visitor bought them for her on a whim, surprising her with them, it is the slave woman who invites us, and the man who bought them for her, into the painting. Ensuring that she takes care of her master's wishes, the maid is painted with concern, while Olympia is subdued under the mundanity, and slavery, of prostitution. Causing discomfort with a majority of her viewers, Olympia is painted high above the bottom of the painting, as opposed to Titian's Venus - giving her a sense of power, and assurance, over her male spectators. Unlike the hand Titian placed on his Venus, which played into the contour of the Venus' body, Olympia's hand

covers her pelvis firmly, asserting her presence in the process - even though she is going to be consumed, Olympia states, is her shoulders are not thrown back to let you know she is happy in being consumed. Looking no older than 16, her shoes are dainty playthings that contrast with the stature of the picture's leftmost side - she is not only not granting access to herself, but is in many ways, protecting her maid, and the white Frenchman's authority over her, in the process. A classic in more ways than one, Olympia is world renowned for her ability to close the distance, much like Manet's *Luncheon on the Grass*, between the male gaze and its otherization of the female body.

What is being said here, and critiqued by Manet, is not simply that of the male gaze, but also the hypocrisy of the French empire's modernization of France as a whole. Take, for example, these two contemporary figures of American life, Sophie Rain, a white Christian nude model, and black rapper Glorilla. Sophie Rain became viral on the internet as one the most successful nude models in the OnlyFans industry, amassing a supposed $43 million dollar a year empire by selling pictures of her exposed breasts through the platform. Supposedly Christian, Rain claims to still be a virgin, the totality of American technological progress hindered in one swoop as the only end goal of the freedom of information granted on social media platforms is access to nude images of Sophie Rain and the like. Taking inspiration from Kim Kardashian, the dichotomy laid out in Astruc's poems repeats itself - the black woman, in this case, Glorilla, is she who brings the spring of Rain's body into the lives of the men who wish to consume her. Glorilla, the caretaker of all American women, the soundtrack to the tiktoks by wish they render their bodies beautiful to cater the gaze of men online, is the woman who knows the most about us, a woman who, much like the slave in Olympia, despite being granted freedom, is still under the rule of being relegated to a rapper, and servant to her white audience's appropriation of her culture. As James Baldwin wrote,

"There was no one more forbearing than Aunt Jemima, no one stronger or more pious or more loyal or more wise; there was, at the same time, no one weaker or more faithless or more vicious and certainly no one more immoral. Uncle Tom, trustworthy and sexless, needed only to drop the title "Uncle" to become violent, crafty, and sullen, a menace to any white woman who passed by. They prepared our feast tables and our burial clothes; and, if we could boast that we understood them, it was far more to the point and far more true that they understood us. They were, moreover, the only people in the world who did; and not only did they know us better than we knew ourselves, but they knew us better than we knew them. This was the piquant avoring to the national joke, it lay behind our uneasiness as it lay behind our benevolence: Aunt Jemima and Uncle Tom, our creations, at the last evaded us; they had a life— their own, perhaps a better life than ours—and they would never tell us what it was. At the point where we were driven most

privately and painfully to conjecture what depths of contempt, what heights of indifference, what prodigies of resilience, what untamable superiority allowed them so vividly to endure, neither perishing nor rising up in a body to wipe us from the earth, the image perpetually shattered and the word failed.

In our image of the Negro breathes the past we deny, not dead but living yet and powerful, the beast in our jungle of statistics. [...] It is a sentimental error, therefore, to believe that the past is dead; it means nothing to say that it is all forgotten, that the Negro himself has forgotten it. It is not a question of memory. Oedipus did not remember the thongs that bound his feet; nevertheless the marks they left testified to that doom toward which his feet were leading him. The man does not remember the hand that struck him, the darkness that frightened him, as a child; nevertheless, the hand and the darkness remain with him, indivisible from himself forever, part of the passion that drives him wherever he thinks to take fligh.t"

It is not simply that Olympia renders minute the male gaze - it renders the truth of the supposed progress of French civilization, one that, in modernizing and bringing freedom of movement to is aristocrats, is brought to a speeding halt when the only invitation into the August young woman known as France, this time nicknamed Olympia, is the freed slave women of the empire.

She reclines, more or less,
Try that posture, it's hardly languor.
Her right arm sharp angles.
With her left she conceals her ambush.
Shoes but not stockings,
how sinister. the flower
behind her ear is naturally
not real, of a piece
with the sofa's drapery.
The windows (if any) are shut.
This is indoor sin.
Above the head of the (clothed) maid
is an invisible voice balloon: Slut.

But. Consider the body,
unfragile, defiant, the pale nipples
staring you right in the bull's eye.
Consider also the black ribbon
around the neck. What's under it?
A fine red threadline, where the head
was taken off and glued back on.
The body's on offer,

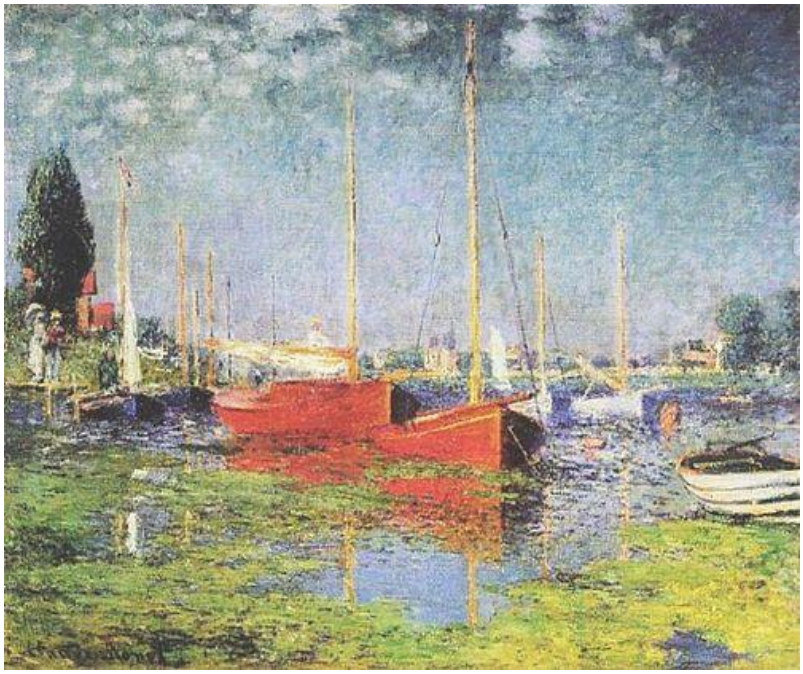
but the neck's as afar as it goes.

This is no morsel.
Put clothes on her and you'd have a schoolteacher,
the kind with the brittle whiphand.

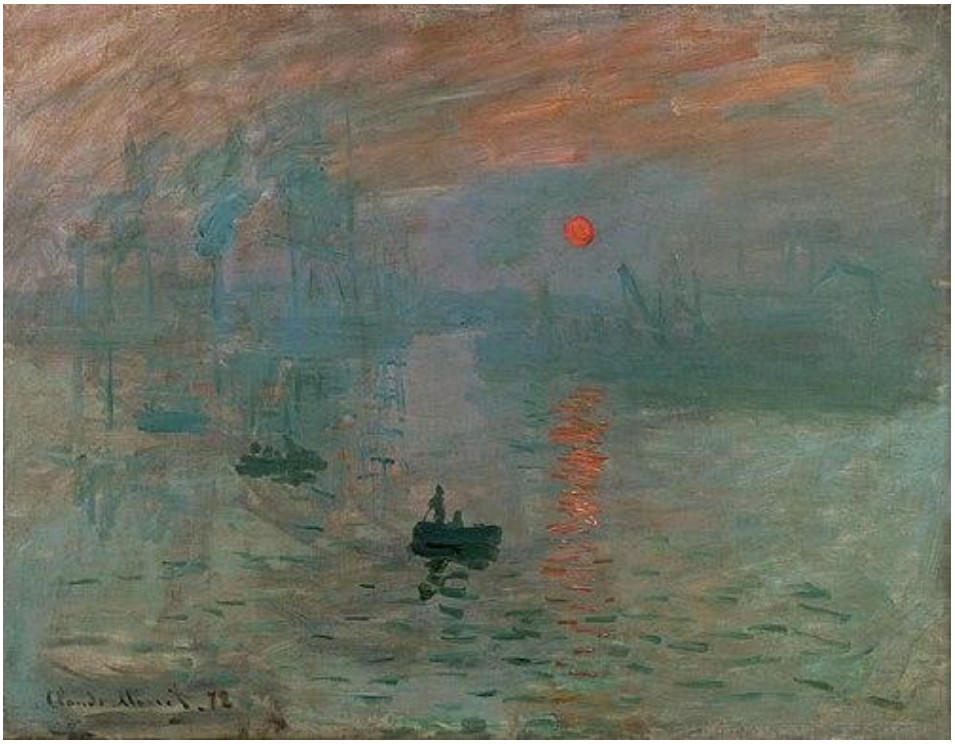
There's someone else in this room.
You, Monsieur Voyeur.
As for that object of yours
she's seen those before, and better.

I, the head, am the only subject
of this picture.
You, Sir, are furniture.
Get stuffed.

-Margaret Atwood

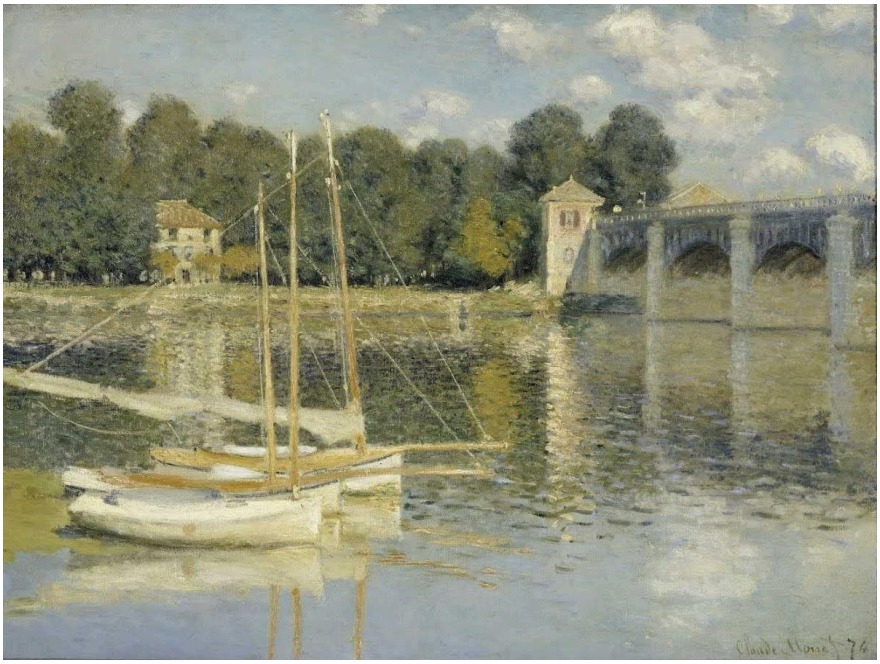


The industrialization of France, however, was not without its own artistic revolutions. Pictured here is the work *Red Boats at Argenteuil*, by Monet. Painted a decade after Olympia's announcement of the French identity, the pastoral landscape memorialized here is one of the new petit bourgeois lifestyle afforded to the French affluent enough to visit the suburbs of Paris after modernization. Marking a true shift in painting, the speed by which the world moved would be captured in Monet's brushstrokes, eschewing the traditions of color blocking and illustration to depict the process of seeing, not simply the image itself.



Rather than create a still scene as done in *The Fatherland in Danger* by Guillon, where individual vignettes of French identity and civic duties were painted without hierarchy, or by creating narrative tension through geometry and illustrative composition, color forms the basis by which hierarchy is preserved in Monet's work. Drawn first to the sun in this image, our eyes are then drawn to the fish below, each quick brushstroke a reflection of the way our eyes capture movement. Take, for example, a clock. Dart your eyes from it, and then dart your eyes back to it, and you will notice that the second hand always takes longer to move on the first second than the rest. This is because our brains, when shifting between perspectives, fill in the blur as we dart our eyes with an initial image of what we dart them towards, in order to minimize the blur of motion as our eyes dart around rooms. What Monet is capturing here is this process - the way by which color, and nature, leave an impression on our eyes, rather than simply the structure, or narrative of an image, as a whole. The totality of color in this sunrise is captured as the sun is held as our introduction into the image. Then, guiding us through the way his eyes darted around the scene, Monet guided us into the flashes of his vision, turning the lake, its fishes, and its ripples, into brushstrokes.

In contrast, take David's Oath of the Horatii once more. Color here is only used to convey the contrast between contours - each figure is drawn, then filled in, according to the artificial lighting of the scene. Rather than display an artist's narrative vision, Monet, choosing color mixing over color contrast, would choose to depict the process of seeing itself.

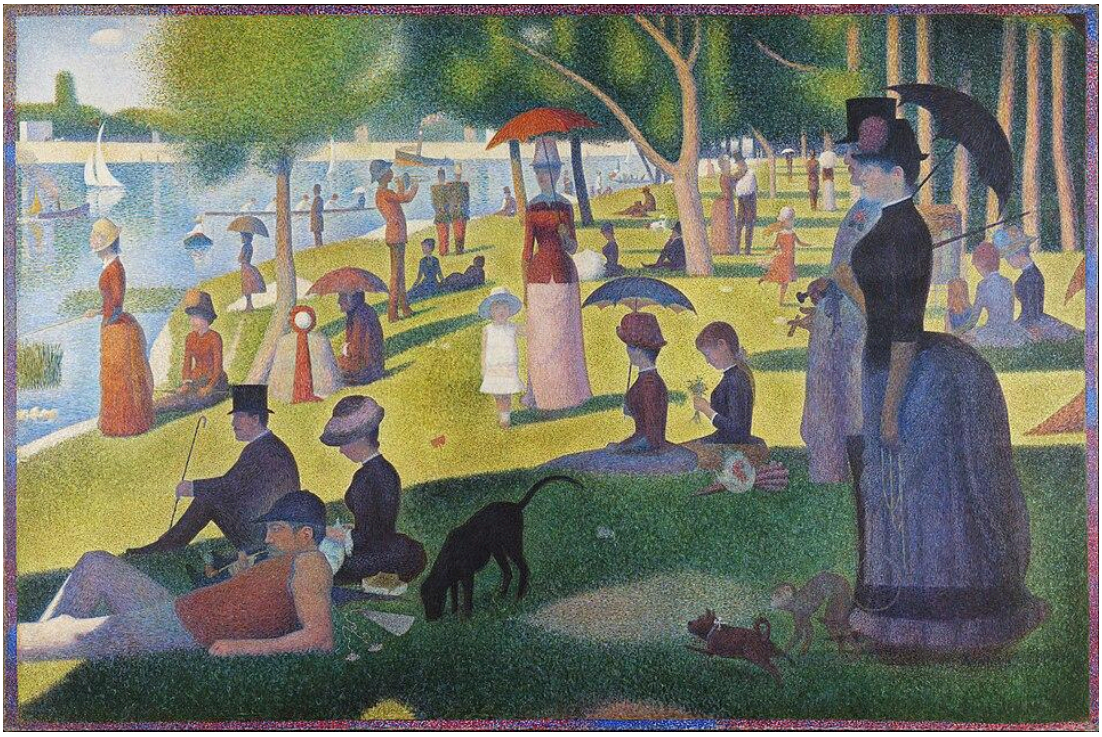


Depicting the movement of French people into the suburbs, and the shifting ways they came to understand nature, vacation, and luxury in the process, paintings such as this one in Argenteuil use the process of vision as the perfect means to capture the reflections of light over water. Rather than simply drawn an ocean and fill it in with color to evoke a mood like lighting in an opera, light itself becomes the poetry of this scene as our eyes dart around Monet's brushwork to remind ourselves of how, in flashes, we catch the glimpses of nature reflected back into itself through the waters of lakes and rivers. Nature itself was recreated through what would now be an activity known as recreation; the paintings, deemed "incomplete", depict not objects or boats or bridges, but simply the light they emanate. The mirage of life, can then be said, was captured in the reflection of French architecture at the waters of Argenteuil.

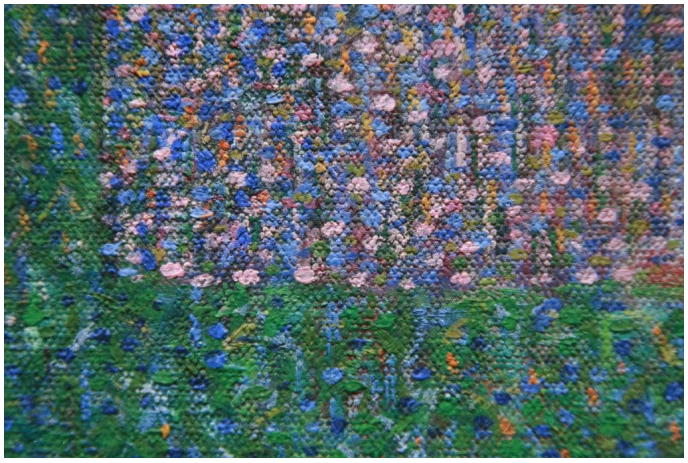
This new life, of course, came with it a fashion to match. Pictured here are the so-called lower classes of French life, a woman painted in drab harmony as her partner tries to swoon her over and convince her of the new life the French empire has imposed onto her, still relegated to adornment in hat and dress as the boats in the background adorn the waters of Argenteuil. In between both figures, in the background, smokestacks can be seen, followed by a rope hanging from a sailboat in the midground, leading the viewer to the flowers in the woman's hat in the foreground. Each of these symbols can be seen as representing three new tenets of the French petit bourgeois life: the industry, as seen by the smokestack, social class, as seen by the boat, and recreation, and the new access to nature by modernity, as represented by the flowers. The french identity, once confined neatly by the definitions of rural and urban, Paris and countryside, is now subsumed under this painting, as the freedom of movement, access to the art galleries for the new petit bourgeois to buy Monet's paintings, and the rejection of religious tradition, lay the foundation for the new French identity.

It is this new industry that lies at the heart of the latter half of French painting in the 19th century. Industry speeds up life as the speed by which work and labor is completed takes hold over daily ritual; smokestacks, pictured here, simply adorn the backgrounds as clouds while a train goes over a newly minted bridge with a sailboat underneath. The blurring of industry and nature, man and machine, man and God, all are ushered in by the speed of Monet's brushstrokes. Argenteuil is as man-made as the factory itself, its new idyllic pastures not simply machinations of Titian and his pastoral landscapes made in the image of Greek myth. Rather than be restricted by painting conventions, Monet subsumes modern life through the new logic he invented for painting - rather than have man be represented in through his idealized form, and then be filled in, his might is represented metaphorically through his industry, and the speed of the new lifestyle and artistry it afforded him.

Pastoral depictions of the French suburbs take precedence in the late 19th century once more through the works of Seurat. Pictured here is a similar idyll, but different ideology, of the classical pastoral works of Europe. Bodies are not preserved through Greek and Roman myth - instead, doing away with impressionism and ushering in the practice of pointillism, pale white nudes continue to exist, except in this case, their solitude and solemnity is an example of the way their bodies have been worked at the factories pictured from afar. Somewhat serene, men are done away with altogether, their bodies and identities simply blending into the stillness of the image through the stiffness of their composure. Easy to mistake for impressionism, the way by which this painting was created hides within it a much more technical story.

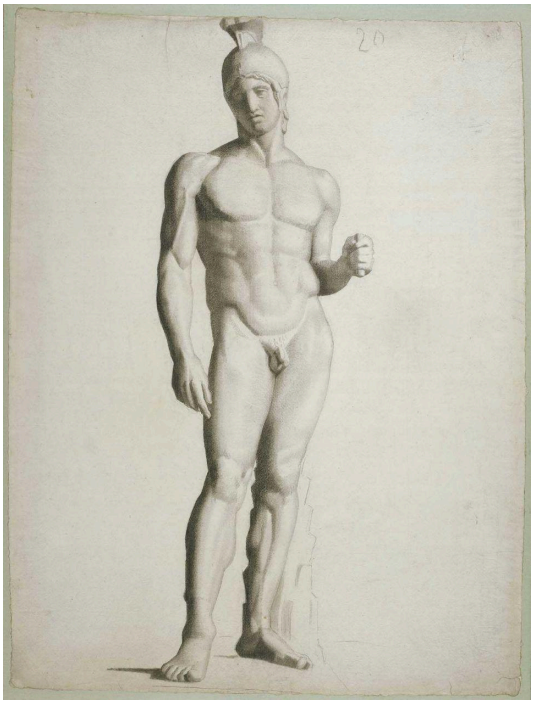


It is in contrast to the Bathers at Asnieres that his now most famous work, A sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte, was painted in 1884-1886. A famous area to meet prostitutes at the time, the painting is filled with references to them: both the woman holding a monkey on a leash, and the woman fishing, are said to be of women looking for juggalos. The renderings of human beings here were so stiff they were compared to Egyptian hieroglyphs; there is almost no interaction in the image as the middle classes of France enjoy their public selves with one another, privately, as modernization bleeds into pastoral life. Notice here, too, the aura and halo that exists around the bodies of all the bodies pictured here - rather than having contour, these bodies, using new pointillism techniques, were rendered free of the need of a contour altogether.

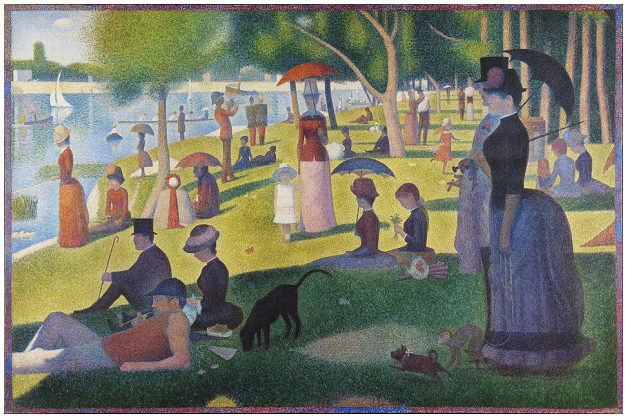
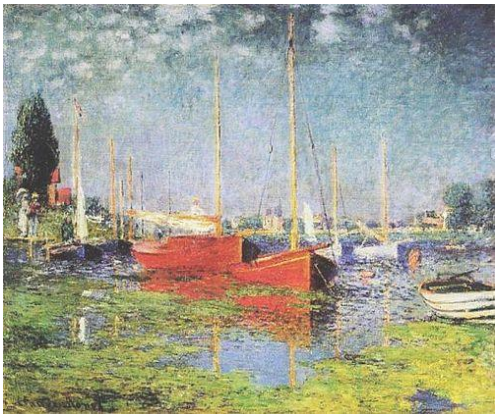


It was based upon this principle that Seurat founded the neo-impressionist dot. Believing that Monet's paintings were too subjective, Seurat, an anarchist, believed that there was an inherent color hierarchy to the world, one defined by the scientific aesthetic principles of color theorist Charles Henry. Choosing solely individual pigments, color theorists of the time divided color into 12 different hues, only to alter their tones by adding or removing white from the mix. Seeing how, when mixing colors, colors would dull in tone, especially if, for example, you mix colors opposite on the color wheel, such as yellow and purple, Seurat and his neo-impressionists, using pointillism, forewent the practice of mixing colors altogether. Instead, they simply placed dots of intense hues onto the canvas, each one only existing side by side to another complementary color. This intensive process means artworks would take weeks to finish, but in turn, gave them the aura like glow of the unity of opposites. Serving as musical notes do in harmony, or the voice in Beatles songs forming a chorus, the specificity of color meant that there was no artist's vision, or subjectivity, as Monet was enslaved to. Instead, painting of this caliber, in the eyes of the neo-impressionists, was completely *objective* - following the laws of science, not man's nature, as the foundation of its moral aesthetics. Water, in Seurat's world, and its reflections, would not be captured, in movement, through the subjectivity of Monet's eyes - instead, it would be captured objectively, following higher moral standards of aesthetic sensibility.

This means, in the case of older contours, the laws by which these paintings abided could be sidestepped by Seurat. In Delacroix's *Massacre at Chios*, contour, and its small negation, provided a red glaze and shadow to all bodies that inhabited it - much like the sensual contour of Titian's Venus. In either case, however, the bodies are still rendered whole by the filling in of their forms.



Seurat, no stranger to this, was himself under the constant pressure of enclosing his bodies, and their figures, through previous pictorial laws. Pictured here is his ability to do so - enclosed from the world is this helmeted warrior whose identity and body is resolved through his enclosure, both from the world, and from himself. Seurat, however, had no interest in continuing this practice, choosing instead to, through pointillism, refuse to inclose his bodies altogether. In turn, they become unresolved, as much protestant murals and identities of the bourgeois ideal of nature as the world and backgrounds which they inhabit.

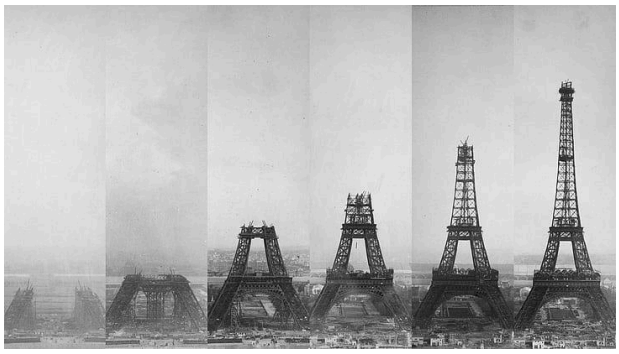



In either case, both Monet and Seurat sought to respond to the industrialization of France in different ways. If Monet made improvisational paintings in the style of today's Jazz musicians, Seurat made classical orchestras, each dot hoping to "obey the laws of nature" in a process Nietzche later described as the tyranny of the self. Monet changed what it meant to be a skilled painter: his paintings were uniquely his, not made in the image of the French academy, each one a window marked with the signs of his manufacture and his reality. Much like the river of information we catch glimpses of ourselves on our Instagram feeds, each one uniquely our own, the language of Monet's ability to capture the way we see is as subjective as them. Seurat, however, believed that, much like the labor on the factory floor, painting could be industrialized and follow the laws of color science: objectivity, and its mass production in factory lines, was as much a tool that artists could use as the industrialists of the West did.

It is upon the industrialization of labor that William Morris, British printmaker, founded his practices upon. Factories had changed the nature of the division of labor, and man's relationship to it. Unlike the skilled labor of a single cobbler, "unskilled" labor becomes the norm at the factories, where men are expendable operators of machinery. A type of cannibalism, this factory labor consumed man's body, a consumption Morris hoped to overcome by reuniting manual and intellectual labor. His art prints and wallpapers, reminiscent of Muslim geometric patterns, created museum quality art for those who afford them, bringing in high art into everyday homes. Based on the belief that everyone had innate aesthetic impulses, his wallpapers hoped, through it, to create a future of aesthetic pleasure made by the impossible present of factory labor.

Morris himself was not alien to high art - pictured here is his own painting capabilities in the year of 1858. This kind of portraiture, as was in the practice of painters like David, who painted *The Death of Marat*, was based on the ability to capture an idea through color and illustration. It necessitates a liberal arts background to fully capture its symbolism where manual production, taught in academies, is inferior to the idea, or story, the painting wishes to convey. By 1861, Morris would eschew this to found his printshop: for Morris, the intellectual labor of print design, and printmaking, were intertwined. Much like the intellectual labor of video editing, this labor could preserve itself through modern life.

Morris and the brotherhood he would found believed that Raphael and his renaissance school lied about pictorial representation. It is from his school that academies were formed, and the liberal arts, and the rupturing of art from day to day life, was, in Morris' worldview, birthed. Seen as primitive at the time, his woodblock prints are still available for purchase today - the wearing down of woodblocks over time would only add, in Morris' eyes, humanity to the industrial society of which he believed, through his art, could be rectified into a more perfect future. Woodblocks, despite being outdated, only added, especially in today's age, to the ornate quality by which he believed all men were entitled to. Rather than represent the view of a single artist's brush stroke, or the scientific color theory of Seurat, Morris believed that manual labor itself could be transformed into intellectual labor. Technological progress, for Morris, did not equate to societal progress - for Morris, a window into man's perspective and his ability to capture it in painting was not on the same caliber of simply using the symbols of nature to represent aesthetic beauty. Art, for Morris, did not belong in a separate domain. A.I. based art, for Morris, would pose multiple questions - is the collective nature of artificial intelligence, the coders who came together to make it, a higher intellectual pursuit than the manual labor, and liberal art education, of the artists that came before it?



France, it seems, had no time to stop industrializing to answer such questions. The eiffel tower, at then the world's tallest structure, had, through the advent of steel based engineering, been unveiled 100 years after the French revolution at the 1889 World's Fair. Alongside it came the supremacy of the French empire: a Javanese village had been imported and reconstructed inside of Paris. Not only did it display the might and breadth of the French empire, it simultaneously displayed the supposed subhuman nature, and primitive nature, of the people of Java. Upon seeing this, Paul Gaugin, a friend of Vincent Van Gogh, decided to move back into the French countryside, hating the modernization of French society.

Once depicted and practicing in the styles of Courbet,

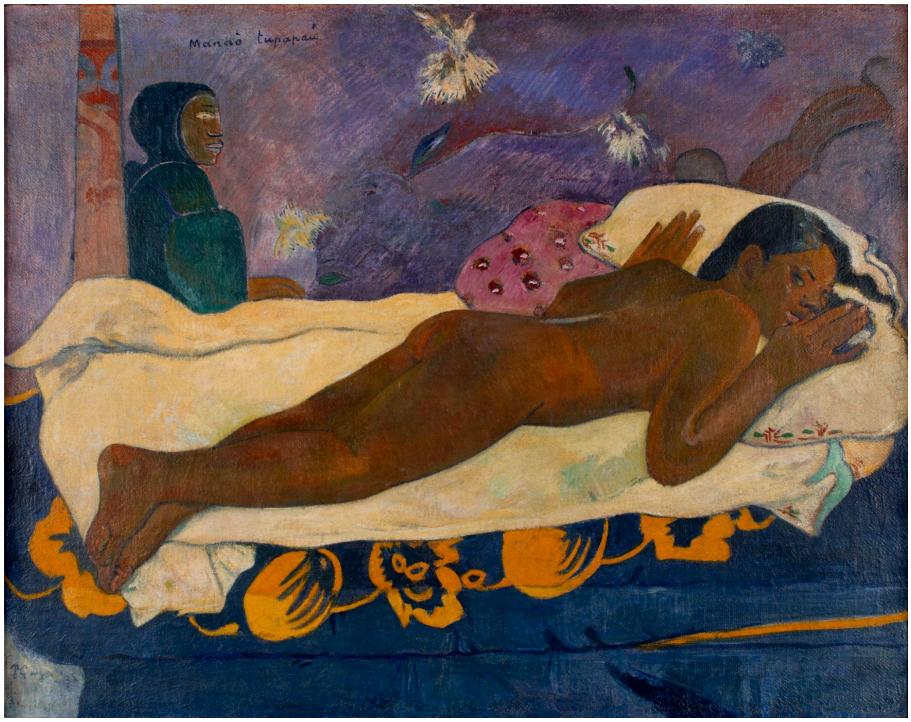
the French countryside had been remade in the image of the petit bourgeois who came from Paris.

Impressionism, now mostly over, led Gauguin to take up symbolism as his new art movement, one that used figures and illustration to depict archetypal meanings rather than partake in the materialism of impressionists and pointislists. In doing so, symbolists hoped to return to a more metaphysical painting style akin to history painting of years prior, albeit this time with the newfound color theory of Western painting. Moving to Denis in the Northwest of France, Gauguin painted the world around him. The rural frenchwoman, depicted here in her "traditional" garb, had been relegated to a tourist attraction, a caricature of herself for Parisian tourists. Religious symbolism comes into play once more as angels are depicted fighting in a vision after a sermon, Gauguin's desire for the supernatural superseding his need to depict green pastures as green. Slowly coming to hate the European struggle for money, Gauguin rejected the false idylls of pastoral landscape found in the works of the time for the real, "primitive", society of Tahiti. Writing to his wife before leaving to Tahiti, Gauguin wrote to her:

"May the day come soon when I be myself in the woods of an ocean island. To live there in ecstasy, calmness, and art, with a family, and far from the European struggle for money. There in Tahiti, I shall be able to listen to the sweet murmuring music, to my heart's beating, and the silence of the beautiful tropical night. I shall be in amorous harmony with the mysterious beings of my environment. Free at last without money trouble, I will be able to love, to sing, to die."

While it may be easy to see Gauguin's rejection of France for primitive Tahiti as anti-Western, or irrational, it is important to note, that apart from leaving the constrictions of Christian morality, he is also returning to a version of the world closer in nature to that of the primitive Greeks and Romans. Rather than idolize their green pastures from afar, and try to interact with the metaphysical through metaphor, Gauguin's rejection of modernity is in itself a modern concept; his rejection of it is spurred by his artistic desire to capture something artists of the time could only imagine through their modern lens. Uninhibited now by the false moral platitudes of modern civilization, Gauguin leaves France and his family behind to pursue the true

metaphysical in the freedom of Tahiti, a freedom not in line with the liberty Marat was stabbed to death in his bath for.



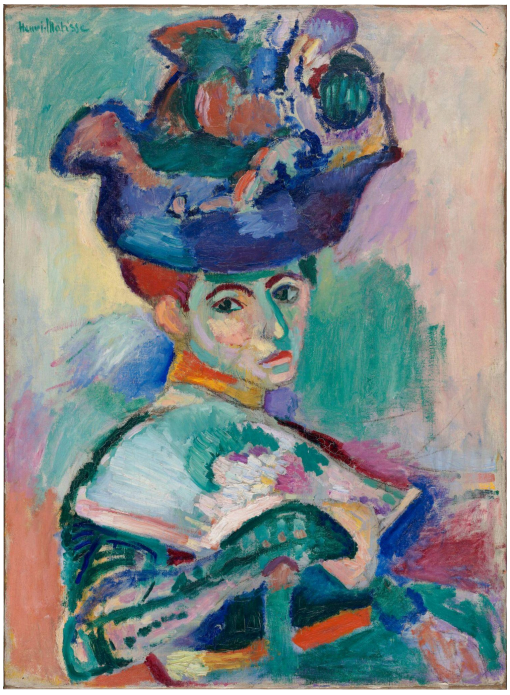
Looking to capture his own desire and Western anxieties through his Tongan wife of 13 years, Gauguin only sees his own fears about himself reflected in her. Having learned to despise Frenchwomen out of his own meekness, he writes: “On the one side a fresh blossoming, faith and nature ; on the other the season of barrenness, law and artifice. Two races were face to face, and I was ashamed of mine.” when describing the time he introduced his child bride, who he compares to the 18 year olds of France, to a Frenchwoman on the island. That said, he said of Tahura, his bride, “I loved Tehura and told her so ; it made her laugh — she knew it, very well.” Slowly growing closer, the two developed a bond as in each other they confided the secrets of their nations. In her, Gauguin, freed from Christian morality, could face his own insecurities, freely. Walking in on her late one night, he depicted her in this painting seen here, blending elements of both Titian’s Venus and Manet’s Olympia at the same time. He described the scene, in a letter, like so:

“I saw her - Tahura lay motionless, naked, lying face downward flat on the bed with the eyes inordinately large with fear. She looked at me, and seemed not to recognize me. As for myself I stood for some moments strangely uncertain. A contagion emanated from the terror of Tehura. I had the illusion that a phosphorescent light was streaming from her staring eyes. Never had I seen her so beautiful, so tremulously beautiful. And then in this half-light which was surely populated for her with dangerous apparitions and terrifying suggestions, I was afraid to make any movement which might increase the child's paroxysm of fright. How could I know what at that moment I might seem to her? Might she not with my frightened face take me for one of the demons and specters, one of the Tupapaiis, with which the legends of her race people sleepless nights? Did I really know who in truth she was herself? The intensity of fright which

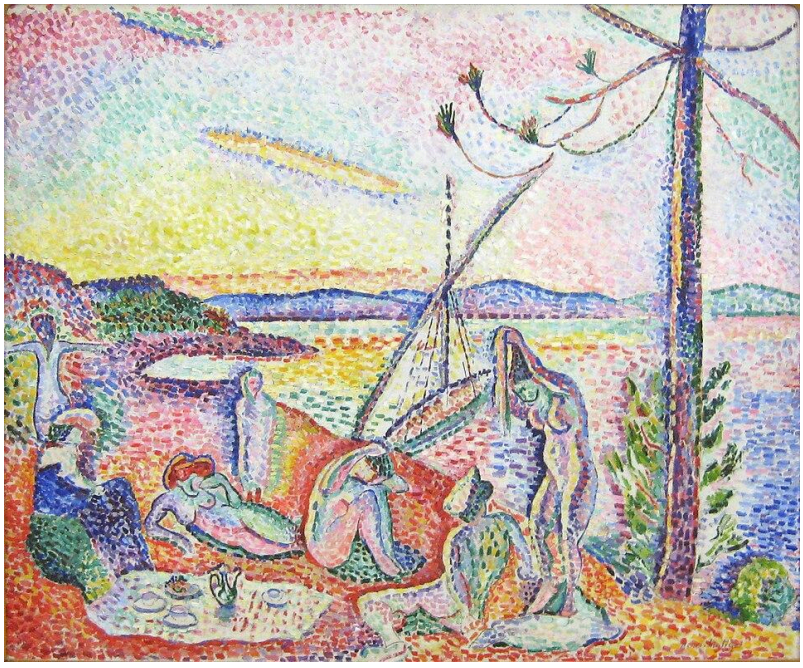
had dominated her as the result of the physical and moral power of her superstitions had transformed her into a strange being, entirely different from anything I had known heretofore."

Rather than come into contact with her, he comes into contact with his own insecurity, the one that drove him out of France, and, in doing so, through her, finds the beauty of his nation in his process. The ghosts he speaks of are not her own - rather, they are the ghosts he thinks she has, ghosts that only exist in his mind, born of his own history and socioeconomic context. Painting her as his own Venus, as his own Olympia, he finds in Tahura the France, and his motherland, he was always looking to capture, one that continued to be haunted, not by Tongan ghosts, but by the spirit of Marat himself. Coming in contact with a different type of civic duty, it is through his painting, and his ability for biography, that this Tahitian woman becomes a French one, for in being painted through a Frenchman's eyes, the only aspects of her captured are those a Frenchman could or could not understand, his demons captured in the rightmost side of the painting through her culture. Accessible only to her bodies are these dark fantasies, the leftmost half of the painting instead showing what was behind Olympia's curtains, the world of the dark skinned slave only Olympia could gatekeep men from. Olympia, can then be said, simply exists in the room opposite Tahura, the male fantasy that created her now far off in the world of Tahitian spirits behind her.

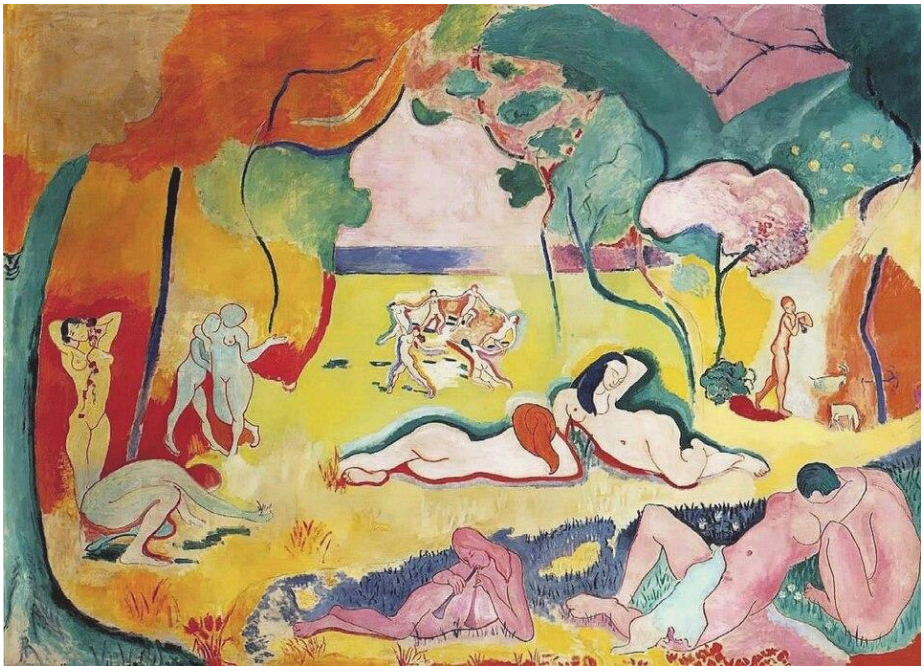
Gauguin, having already shown the lack of necessity on the part of the painter to depict pastoral landscapes through symbolism rather than color alone, would set the foundation for the next generation of 20th century painters.



Matisse, seen here having painted a woman with a hat, took impressionism and further perverse contour. Now almost completely removing it, color is used to define objects. His brushwork and color choices were described by a critic as akin to “wild beasts”. From here, art galleries slowly begin to have participants that state, “my kid could have done that.”



Here, the pointillist dot and the brushwork of Monet blend together as color comes to define pictures and portraiture rather than illustration. Bad drawing becomes the norm as the color theory which permeated Seruat's works are blended with the necessity to capture the impression light leaves on the eye. Emanating a cool gaze from the middle left hills and sunset, this pastoral scene, one akin to those seen before drawn by Titian in accord with the nymphs of Greek myth, uses color choice to establish hierarchy in the painting. The saturation and hues of the colors, while mixed, leaves an impression on the eye that, in allowing the blending of colors through their presence and contrasts in relation to one another, serves to saturate the sky through the blurring between white canvas and color choices. The tree here, painted blue, has no difficulty stating its presence; to understand it in the context of art history and our own lives is enough for us to understand it as such. Think, after all, of a potted plant you would put in your own home: is that really a plant, a tree, or anything else related to nature, or an ornament you planted or brought home to remind you what nature is? The trees and lawns in your front lawns are not trees - they are ornaments, man made, that we have decided to treat as such.



This extrapolation of the ornamentation of life Matisse's saturation of colors and absolution of contour seen here in the sensuality of *Le bonheur de vivre*. Emancipating colors into their absolutes in difference to the pointillists, women here, displayed in the nude, barely classify as such. Lacking any tonal variety in color and shading to activate the scene outside of flat appearance, its "superflat" nature is only outdone by its ability to establish shape and presence through color blocking and contrast alone. Depth, rather than be created through shading, perspective, and color, by drawing hills in front of one another and then shading them in, is instead established by the slow gradient of bright green-yellow that blends into red-orange red from right to left in the painting. Color choices are depicted snaking around the blue green of the lovers in the front and leading us into the dancers in the center of the image as, rather than simply throwing color onto a painting already outlined, color itself, and its ability to move through the color spectrum, becomes the way by which to establish the fate of the women painted. When asked about the philosophy behind painting, Matisse stated: "Color was not given to us so that we could imitate nature. It was given to us so we could express our emotions." To Matisse, it was not a simple question of what colors to choose to depict reality - he believed that some blues were more blue than others, and that when necessary, the right answer was always simply to "add more blue" - it was not the quality of the color that depicted the artist's autobiography of his world, but rather it was the quantity of blue that ennobled him to capture man's need for decoration. For this reason, art critic Clement Greenberg would write: "Decoration is the spectre that haunts modernist painting. And part of the latter's formal mission is to find ways to use the decorative against itself." Marat's death, and the freedom to split off from the church, would eventually lead to such a hypocrisy of values, decoration used against decoration until inevitably Hitler, when denied entrance into art school, rose to power in Germany as a result.

1905 would mark the year Matisse drew his own blue nude, one so grotesque it drew the ire of the majority of critics who gazed upon his own eroticism through the figure. Now fully turning the idea of woman and her nude ornate, highlighting his own quality to do so rather than trying to portray his idea of a woman through his ability to accurately capture one in paint, the strange contours and body posture would eventually catch the eye of Pablo Picasso, despite having not caught the attention of the men who wished to consume her. Contradicting his own innate desire for ornamentation in painting against man's desire for the woman as his ornament, when questioned about her appearance, Matisse replied: "If I met such a woman in the street, I would run away. I do not create a woman; I make a picture." Like the simplicity of his belief in "adding more blue", the plentitude of color and aesthetic was merely enough to depict the difficulty of this woman trying to become appealing to her onlookers.

Eventually undertaking Matisse's ordeal of representation as his own, Picasso looked not simply to ornamentation as the foundation of his works. Picture here is one of his most famous paintings, the women of Avignon, depicted in what he would consider the nudes of 5 women, all prostitutes, at a brothel on Carrer d'Avinyo, a street in Barcelona.

Drawing first on inspiration from the painter Cezanne,

And later African masks, Picasso realized that it was not necessary to paint, or even draw eyes, to symbolize them. That is to say, as it is on the left hand side, a woman's arms can depict her bending over and her arms at the same time, similar as it did in Caravaggio's *Entombment of Christ*. The African mask here serves the same function - we do not know that the cylinders there are eyes until we have been trained and conditioned to do so.

This means, that in the case of a painting such as this one, Picasso is free to abstract perspective and the means by which it communicates depth, context, and meaning, without needing ever to truly draw it. Summarized by the statement “But my kid could do that!” it is the context of Picasso’s artistry, and his ability to convey dimension without ever complaining of being restricted by the laws of lighting and shading *The Oath of Horatii* was restrained to that made him a master in the eyes of the West. Here, perspective is destroyed altogether, alongside figurative representation, as, for example, in the top right hand corner, a woman’s breast can be represented by simple diamonds on her chest - reflecting both her breasts staring outwards towards us while turning to face her simultaneously. The drapery from which she stands behind juts out between her and the woman standing directly on her left in front of its blue hues - each woman, as do all prostitutes, is trying to turn and contort their bodies to their clientele, hoping to draw him to her as she poses in a myriad of flashes drawing men to her body. If Matisse hoped to give you blue by simply giving you more blue, Picasso argued he would not have to even show you the color blue to give it to you.

Destroying the entirety of western tradition and its necessity to capture mythological forms and the female nude through biography, Picassso eventually boils down all representation into triangles, using the geometric shape as the basis for all future depiction. Now able to paint as freely as possible, color and depiction are thrown as simple means by which to express ornamentation as Matisse did. Color and color harmony are still kept intact as instead of using it to express simple aesthetic consumption, it is the nature of representation as a whole that is questioned. Rather than make a painting in the name of beauty, the nature of beauty, of visual language, of what it means to write a biography, is itself called into question: is it our ability to capture what we consider to be real that makes us able to write biography, or instead, is the question of having made biography in the first place that restricts us from our own humanity? Have we yet to capture the totality of vision, or by that virtue, by creating and dreaming of new words and ways to organize them, or is instead, the simple fact that we have drawn letters to represent the words that emanate from our mouths that which has restricted us from beauty in the first place? What would it mean, as Picasso does here, to simply write a biography made only of vowels, to try to portray three women, as musicians such as Miles Davis do by removing the need for language altogether and simply express his vision of reality through sound alone? Are these even women at all, or have we, through our own history, simply placed themselves alongside our own history to create the illusion that they are?

Pushing this to its extreme, Picasso foregoes artistry and canvases altogether as he begins to paint and make art out of scrap materials. Taking a rope to enclose this tableau, table in French, and making it a painting, also referred to a tableau in French, the religious nature of art is demystified as instead of being inclosed in canvases by the Western tradition, Picasso's works are enclosed by the simple materials made by men before him. Now, art is not simply defined by an artist's ability to paint on canvas - instead, in already having established himself as an artist, the objects in this work are kept as biographies based on Picasso's subjective ability to depict them only through signification alone, in relation to one another, not our preconceived notions of what it means to have a cup painted on a table. Picasso did not simply choose to paint a still life so he could eternalize these objects, and the lifestyle they represent. Rather, he paints a biography of how we have been conditioned to partake in signification.

Biographies such as this one are not simply those of a man, or of his body and image; instead, they are stories of his life, as told through the objects and food he consumes as part of his lifestyle. Each one is a small engineering work that was at the time considered, despite their beauty, lowest on the hierarchy of Western painting. These images want to be believed for their ability to signify the objects we see in our day to day lives rather than be part of the mythology and identity a nation hoped to achieve as done in history paintings. Rather than teach history through mythology, it captures a single moment in a single swoop of illusion - rather than simply try to capture a cup's beauty, it captures it in relation to the rest of the scene, each item and background part of the same illusion that works only in relation to each other signifier in the image.

This is of course what Picasso hopes to do entirely away with. Rather than need to create an image and series of objects that signify one another in relation to each other, Picasso finds a way to signify that a newspaper is a violin through a series of poetic axioms about the nature of illusion and representation in painting. Reducing an object only to its essentials, the work should be read as a series of contradictory opposites, suggesting wood grain of the violin through the newspaper and the atmospheric shadows of the piece's background. The illusion is best kept, hidden and revealed, by the presence of the parallel s's on the violin, as well as the head of the violin drawn half in profile, and then redrawn in a moving motion to represent movement. Picasso, showing the illusion and removing it at the same time, minimizes the need for perspective by, through signification, admitting to the fact that the violin is turned away from us without drawing it as such in relation to the objects around it. Absence, not presence, becomes the violin's condition. There is no truth to this painting, Picasso states - only a series of values Picasso has placed on signifiers to show the relationship between them as depth. Signification then becomes unstable as it is rendered to a series of visual axioms - what then, can be said, as we flatten ourselves, and our reality, to the signifiers of the internet? Could such a social media world be possible, one absent of truth, of minimal signifiers, as Picasso does with this violin?

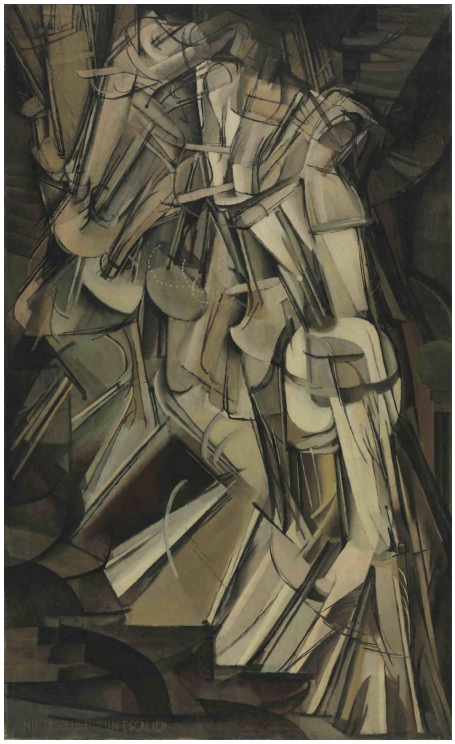
When asked as to why our IQ levels were higher than our parents', scholar James Flynn had this to say:

"We are going to take a quick voyage over the cognitive history of the 20th century, because during that century our minds have altered dramatically. [...] We've gone from a people who confronted a concrete world, and analyzed that world primarily in terms of how much it would benefit them, to people who confront a very complex world. [...] This dramatic change was drawn to my attention through massive IQ gap changes over time [...] we don't just get a few

more questions right on IQ tests, we get far more right [...] than each succeeding generation back to the time that they were invented. [...] If you score us against their norms, we would have an average IQ of 130. [...] Now what we have to imagine is the mental artillery we have picked up over those 100 years [...] Lauriat looked at people just before they entered the scientific age, and he found that these people were resistant to classifying the concrete world: they wanted to break it up into little bits that they could use. [...] He found that they didn't deal well with abstraction [...] He talked to the headman of a person in rural Russia [...] he asked that particular person, 'What do crows and fish have in common?" And the feller said absolutely nothing. [...] He was interested effectively in what he could do with those concrete objects. [...] He was unwilling to treat this as anything but a concrete problem."

The valid horseshoe theory of
reality & illusion
GOOD FOR THE SOUL
everything is illusory
everything is real
total atunement with spirit, the hermit, nonattachment, unity of all ("I am not," "I must!")
total atunement with life and experience, hedonism, dabbling. depravity ("I am," "I desire!")
unemployed, malnourished, theories, home library, visions
- becoming an instrument & channel of mystery, total submission to a higher calling
-poetry
- ketamine
-conspiracy theories
-amazon shopping
cowardly, reclusive
-quoting people
-statistics
-bestselling non-fiction
-white walls, greige couch, lawns, replacing old hardwood floors, tree trimming, overheads
-the new york times
crushes, atmosphere, hobbies, interior design, alcohol aged in oak, placebos, gossip, cured meats, superstition, yearning
-genuine capacity to enjoy Las Vegas
-astrology
-niche aesthetics
- psycho-analysis
-california
-multi-step beauty routines
-passive-agression
-hard seltzers, buzzballs
the uninitiated (children) shouldn't drink
-fixed identity
zone of moderation
A24
marvel
wikipedia
pinterest
zone of danger
Miller
only some things are real
(purgatory)
"I know! I should!" ...what are you, arbiter of existence?
neuroticism, appeals to authority in order to validate oneself, chaos, alienation, materialism, unwillingness to accept the nonsensical & the useless
BAD FOR THE SOUL

This eventually leads to the horseshoe problem posted here on iFunny almost a century later: While trying to get rid of the illusionary, and distance himself from the literature of history painting, a liberal arts education, and literature, would eventually become the only way by which to understand modern art.

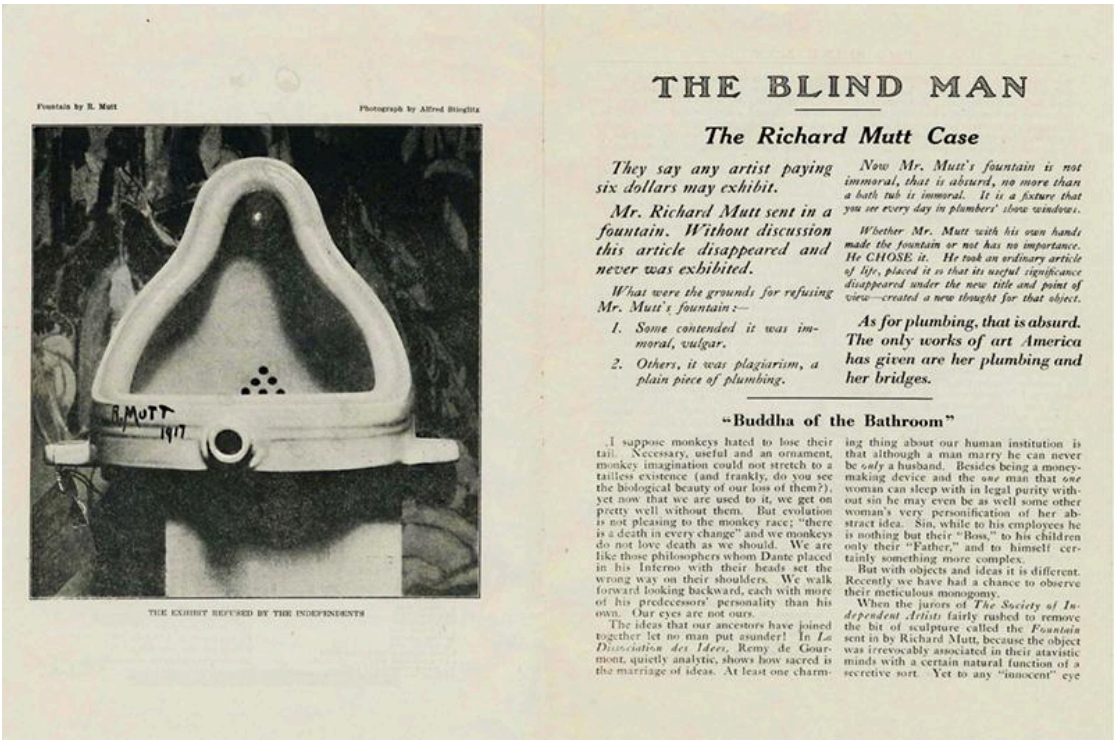


Duchamp, inspired by this, looked to make a name for himself in the world of Western painting in the same way. Depicting here a nude descending down a staircase, he quickly predicted that he would have no future as an artist if he confined himself to the limits of cubism. Shifting to sculpture instead, he would readily become famous for his series of sculptures he colloquially titled “readymades”.

Most famously depicted here in his *Bicycle Wheel*, an allegory to masturbation, Duchamp readily realized that, as an artist, he had the right not only to create art, but to assign cultural value to that which he wanted to be treated or analyzed as art. Taking a bicycle wheel from his garage he would spin in boredom, one can imagine the wheel spinning and creating a sense of movement without going anywhere at all, much like a young man indulging in pornography. In doing so, the whole question of artifice gets thrown out the window: if a mass produced item with material use was created with ornamentation in mind, that is to say, the ornamentation of the factory that produced it, at what point do we separate that which is mass produced, and the history of modernity subsumed within its production, from that which, in response to this modernity, we deem as being valuable art?

How can we, for example, say that this bottlerack is worth any amount of money? Who prescribed it the value - the factory owner that makes money, and seeks to make a profit, or the culture we have created around it to engage with the item? These irrational works of art, made without what we would consider an artist to have made them, were granted such questions once, being labeled as art, they could be upheld to the same artistic and philosophical rigor art critics prescribed to painting. Having never gone so far as to label a female nude, a living woman, a piece of art, the question of biography comes into play once more: it is not the illusion that is a bottle rack that Duchamp questions, as Picasso did, but rather, the illusion that we have called it one that Duchamp questions. This would lead him, of course, to create his most vulgar and famous work.

This “fountain”, pictured here, brings into question the identity of the Western tradition all at once. White and porcelain like the fountains of ancient Rome, Duchamp’s wit comes through as he compares the work of a plumber, and the urinal that gets pissed on, with the fountains that litter the Western world. Strangely enough, in a world so dominated by white European men, as the art world is, Duchamp’s ability to piss on their tradition by comparing their works to those of plumbers makes it all the more ironic that his work was appropriate by the abstract expressionists and conceptual art movements of American artists in New York City later in the 20th century. Taking a stand against german philosopher and altruist Kant, who believed art’s importance was that it “had no use”, that art was autonomous by definition, Duchamp negates this in his inclusions of readymades as art. Duchamp says “art, and more specifically the kind you speak of, does have a use - as much as this fountain.”



Fountain by R. Mutt — Photograph by Alfred Stieglitz

R. MUTT 1917

THE EXHIBIT REFUSED BY THE INDEPENDENTS

THE BLIND MAN

The Richard Mutt Case

They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr. Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr. Mutt's fountain:—

1. *Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.*
2. *Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.*

Now Mr. Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bath tub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows.

Whether Mr. Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges.

"Buddha of the Bathroom"

I suppose monkeys hated to lose their tail. Necessary, useful and an ornament, monkey imagination could not stretch to a tailless existence (and frankly, do you see the biological beauty of our loss of them?), yet now that we are used to it, we get on pretty well without them. But evolution is not pleasing to the monkey race; "there is a death in every change" and we monkeys do not love death as we should. We are like those philosophers whom Dante placed in his Inferno with their heads set the wrong way on their shoulders. We walk forward looking backward, each with more of his predecessors' personality than his own. Our eyes are not ours.

The ideas that our ancestors have joined together let no man put asunder! In *La Dissociation des Idees*, Remy de Gourmont, quietly analytic, shows how sacred is the marriage of ideas. At least one charming thing about our human institution is that although a man marry he can never be *only* a husband. Besides being a money-making device and the *one* man that *one* woman can sleep with in legal purity without sin he may even be as well some other woman's very personification of her abstract idea. Sin, while to his employees he is nothing but their "Boss," to his children only their "Father," and to himself certainly something more complex.

But with objects and ideas it is different. Recently we have had a chance to observe their meticulous monogomy.

When the jurors of *The Society of Independent Artists* fairly rushed to remove the bit of sculpture called the *Fountain* sent in by Richard Mutt, because the object was irrevocably associated in their atavistic minds with a certain natural function of a secretive sort. Yet to any "innocent" eye

Duchamp, having entered his "sculpture" into an art gallery that claimed it would reject no works submitted, had his work rejected on the grounds that it would be absurd and immoral to consider it as such. The mystery of who R. Mutt is remains to this day. Writing to a newspaper under his pseudonym Beatrice Wood, Duchamp had this to say:

"They say any artist paying six dollars may exhibit.

Mr Richard Mutt sent in a fountain. Without discussion this article disappeared and never was exhibited.

What were the grounds for refusing Mr Mutt's fountain:-

1 Some contended it was immoral, vulgar.

2 Others, it was plagiarism, a plain piece of plumbing.

Now Mr Mutt's fountain is not immoral, that is absurd, no more than a bathtub is immoral. It is a fixture that you see every day in plumbers' show windows. Whether Mr Mutt with his own hands made the fountain or not has no importance. He CHOSE it. He took an ordinary article of life, placed it so that its useful significance disappeared under the new title and point of view—created a new thought for that object.

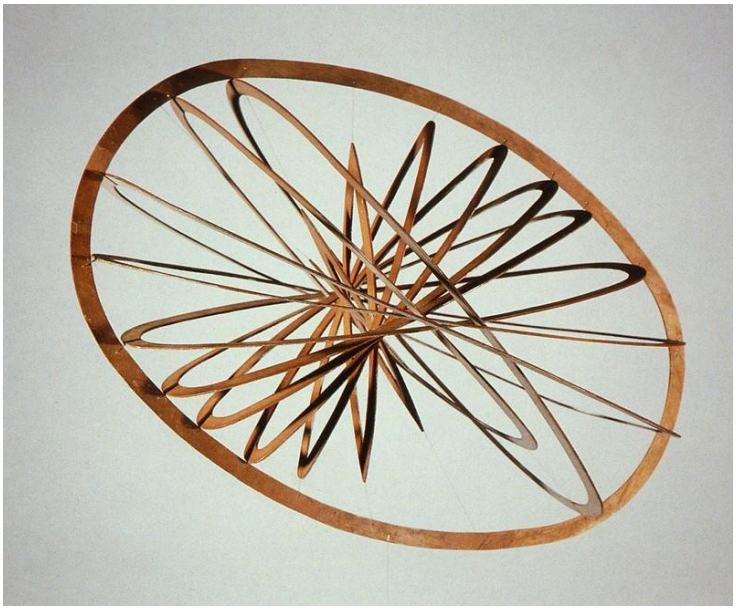
As for plumbing, that is absurd. The only works of art America has given are her plumbing and her bridges."

Marat's bathtub, the ghost of modernism, lays lingering in the background, Christ, nor the remnants of Christianity, ever fully removed from the remains of the West.

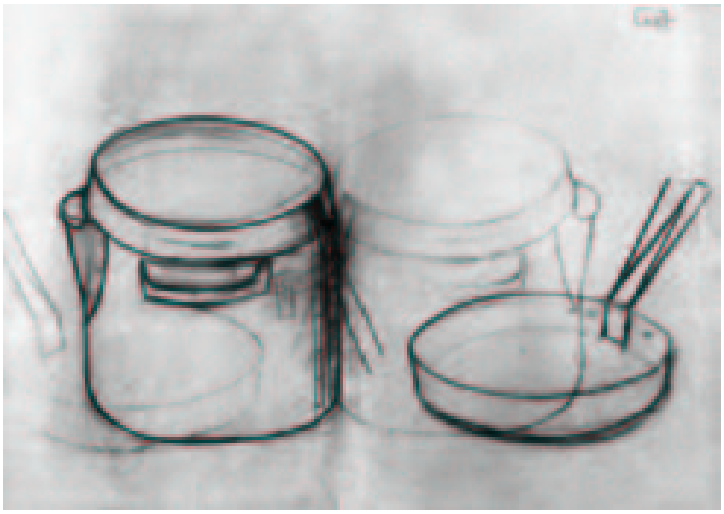
This trolling tradition, the continued use of irony as a cry of help over time, has bled even further into the 21st century. Readymades, now replaced by readymade meme images, have continued to lay the foundation for Western art as it is now through the collective spreading of images, and the value the internet places on said images, that art pieces such as this trollface have been assigned cultural values. While the academy may not like it, these images are art, and the people who have repurposed them are the artists of this new generation. Democratized through the internet, art itself has become series of readymades, the academy replaced by the algorithm as the need for dopamine and digital ornamentation takes precedence over physical ornamentation.

Konstantin Medunetskii, *Composition*, 1920. Medunetskii, *Design for a Construction*, 1920.

Russian constructivists, in search of truer, communist artforms, laid down the foundation for their democratic proletariat art like so. On the left are compositions, art works defined by the bounds of images, in which geometries are constructed in the name of aesthetic possibility based on what they considered universal, scientific principles of anti-bourgeois art. Works defined as such were deemed “enchanted”, and constrained to the limit of an artist’s solitary vision within their studios. Constructions, pictured on the left, were to these communist constructivists 3 dimensional forms that took the maximum use of materials in the name of truth and use, absent of superfluous elements of an artist’s singular vision restrained onto canvas.

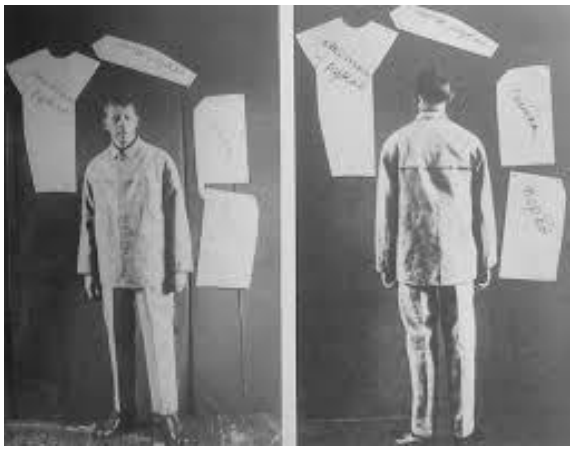


Manifesting in sculptures as those seen here, Rodchenko believed that in the same way that the laborer went to the factory for his motherland, so too could the artist through engineering and productivism make art truly communist in the spirit of the proletariat.

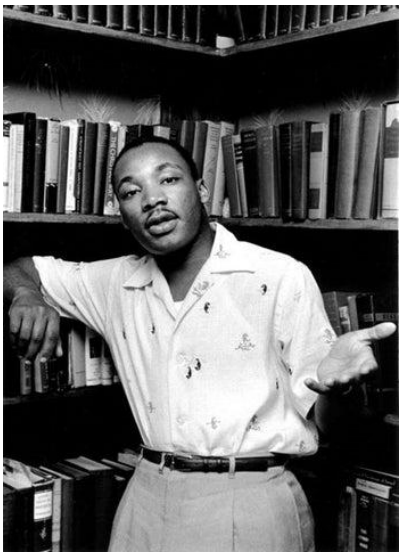


Vladimir Tatlin, looking outward to the materials of what he wished to design, looked to bend the wills of the materials themselves against the will of the artist. If impressionists placed value on the hierarchy of colors, Tatlin looked to the materials themselves as the hierarchy by which he would restrain himself to. What form would a meme have to take for it to be the most useful if it is spread on the internet? Tatlin considered himself a coworker of his materials, not one who could impose his will on them. The material, Tatlin believed, had itself to generate the form, in complete opposition to Picasso, who believed form itself could be subsumed through the artist's paintbrush. Looking out over what he considered that through factory life, life itself had become a land of material. Rather than looking to critique the nature between the public and private self, as in the west, by restraining himself to the quality of the materials, Tatlin hoped to create a spiritual awakening in his people through the materials and items by which they lived. Hoping to create socialist objects in opposition to the ornamentation of artists such as Morris, Tatlin tried to create a multipurpose pot to draw the maximum out of the materials he was granted for the common people. Folding the paper in two, he realizes his failure in being able to overcome form and life as all modern art is summarized in his inability to do so.

НОВЫЙ БЫТ



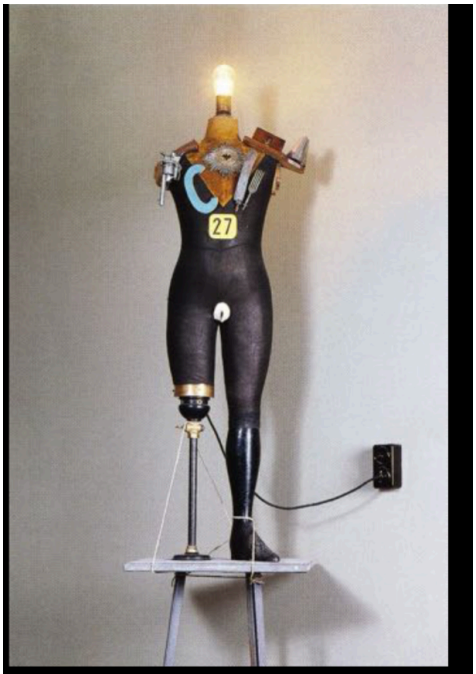
Consumerism and mass production were reintroduced side by side in 1924 with Tatlin's sport suits. Rejecting the idea of fashion brought by Western bourgeois to Russia for a new fashion made in the image of communist principles, desire and need clash together side by side as the warm, unrestrictive sportsuit tells his people to reject the necessity of fashion altogether: what makes a man, Tatlin states, is not his own autobiography through wool suits. Instead, it is his communist spirit, the only thing that can be portrayed once everyone wears the same neutral sportsuit as man's consciousness, in the eyes of Tatlin, is deterred by his social existence, not the consciousness that seeks for material desire. If Duchamp believed that art was retrained and existed as a conceptual practice, Tatlin believed it was the materiality of art and design that enabled it to overcome both schools as material practices.



Continuing into the 21st century, Marat's death still lingers as, through fashion, companies like Louis Vuitton fail to overcome their own definitions of freedom by bringing in Pharell Williams as their lead designer. Failing to celebrate MLK having worn clothes they today label as European in contrast to William's so-called black designs, the spiritual and material consciousness of the West is still restrained by the same definitions Marat died in his bathtub for. The needs of everyday life, and the marketing that it requires to promote it, are still deeply divided from the realities that Martin Luther King died trying to create. Pharell, empowered by Louis Vuitton, has been granted the ability to assign values that which Vuitton, and the West, would never do on their own, a parody of Duchamp as they continue to keep their distance between that which they wish to call "Western" culture by calling it "black" culture, despite it becoming part of Western culture by its mere inclusion.

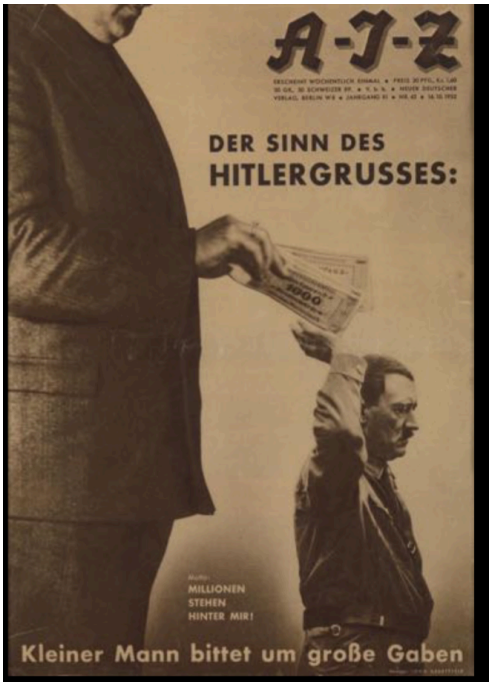
Rupturing the nature of photography and marketing through her collages, Hannah Hoch, now known worldwide as one of the founders of the art movement known as Dadaism, found the aesthetics of modern life, and the art it brought, as disgusting altogether. Their aesthetic of what they considered to be anti-aesthetic hoped to highlight the tension between militarism and commodity as a set of forces living in tension. Cutting images out with kitchen knives, her collages do little to conceal the manufactured aspects by which these images were created.

Breaking and fissuring the rapid flow of information and the tyranny of the visual by which Germans came to live, Hoch made sure to highlight the texture of the paper in her work. Combining the mass amount of images Germans were flooded with, her collages served as an information stream to summarize, through closeness, what so many images could, when placed next to one another, mean for the totality of their production. Hoch, in today's media filled world, would have a hayday. Setting photographs back into motion like film reels, each clipping is an impressionist stroke of the way Germans had trained to see themselves. Violently cutting out images, each collage is a shock meant to kick you out of the action of having seen so many at once, as the nature of photography, and its ability to intensify the relationship to the visual world, takes precedence over Picasso's need to dematerialize the way by which to change the relationship between the visual and pictorial world. The space between war, the collapse done between its pictorial relationship on image and the nature of empire, are collapsed in one stroke, as its images are brought together through her work. In a sense, today, we are all a dada collage of social media posts as Hoch stresses the meaninglessness of all these images, bits and pieces of culture breaking apart the meaning of commodity.



George Grosz and John Heartfield, *The Middle-Class Philistine Heartfield Gone Wild. Electro-Mechanical Tatlin Sculpture*, 1920.

John Heartfield attempted to do the same, seen here as laying the foundation by which war, consumerism, and its spoils, come to form and define new men as sculptures such as this one define a man's body, and its destruction through war, through its spoils.



John Heartfield, *The Meaning of the Hitler Salute: Little Man Asks for Big Gifts. Motto: Millions Stand Behind Me!*, 1932.

John Heartfield, *Adolf, the Superman: Swallows Gold and Spouts Junk*, 1932.

Coming together to form direct communicative actions through visual imagery, Heartfield would take stances against Nazism in some of the world's first and most important visual collages, now a mainstay of internet culture as virtual image collages define not only how we intake news, but the kind of men we believe our public figures to be.

ohn Heartfield, *Forced supplier of human ammunition! Take courage! The State needs the unemployed and soldiers!*, *AIZ*, 1930.

Heartfield, seen here, displays the new German woman, and her struggle, summarized by bringing the images of the casualties and nature of war together. Depicting a mother with a dead boy soldier in the background, he questions the nobility and courage of military generals by showing, through her children, what is expected of the new German mother. Using shock value, he inhibits the reflective contemplation not allowed by moving images - rather than, a flow of images as seen in a movie, his single shots such as this one draw the viewer out of the mass media flow pushed onto the German people. Take, for example, a contemporary re-imagining - stop a TikTok video, turn off the sound, and see just how much visual information we are supposed to consume at once, in one frame, without even contemplating the audio, likes, comments, and rest of it in relation to all the videos seen before. Today, video collage seeks to subsume us into its world as the fact we are able to access the bombs in Palestine and Ukraine in our own backyards seldom seems to change a thing.

Hannah Höch, *Mother: From an Ethnographic Museum*, 1930.

Modern factory work required modern techniques. If Heartfield meant to question man's relationship to their mothers and the expectation they would die for them, asking men to fight against war rather than die in it, Hoch questions the identity of the modern German woman. Taking the same mother Heartfield did, she layers her image against a warlike fiery backdrop, pasting over her face the remnants of imperialism: an image of an African mask and a beautiful eye cut out from a fashion ad. Questioning if the German woman could really be reimagined or severed from her origins through this process, this amalgam of information seeks only to pursue the absurdity of modernity through its creation.

Höch, *Strange Beauty*, 1929.

Hoch continues this in her ethnographic museum series, a living work of images such as the one related here. The German and European woman is satorized through this work, the European so-called “other” and the distance put between her and the German woman brought to a null as she pastes images of these “otherly” women over the European nude, industry and empire, brought together once more. The female body, always the other of man, is in this case negated by bringing the “otherness” of alien women into man’s gaze as the relationship between both women, their relationship and the sense of power they give the Western man, are laid against a backdrop of violence.

Masson, alongside the rest of the surrealists, hoped to achieve some of the same as the Dadaists, highlighting the absurdity of modern imagery through works such as these. Hoping to capture the actual functioning of visual thought, surrealists such as Masson hoped to remove language from the visual world altogether, highlighting instead the process by which our minds form thought through the visual instead. Bridging the process of thought with the process of sight, surrealists began to practice visual and pictorial creation as a stream of consciousness, unlike the practice of transmitting the written sign of conventional culture. Foregoing the resolution of an image altogether, they sought to access things not shaped by language for what they considered a truer philosophy of the mind.

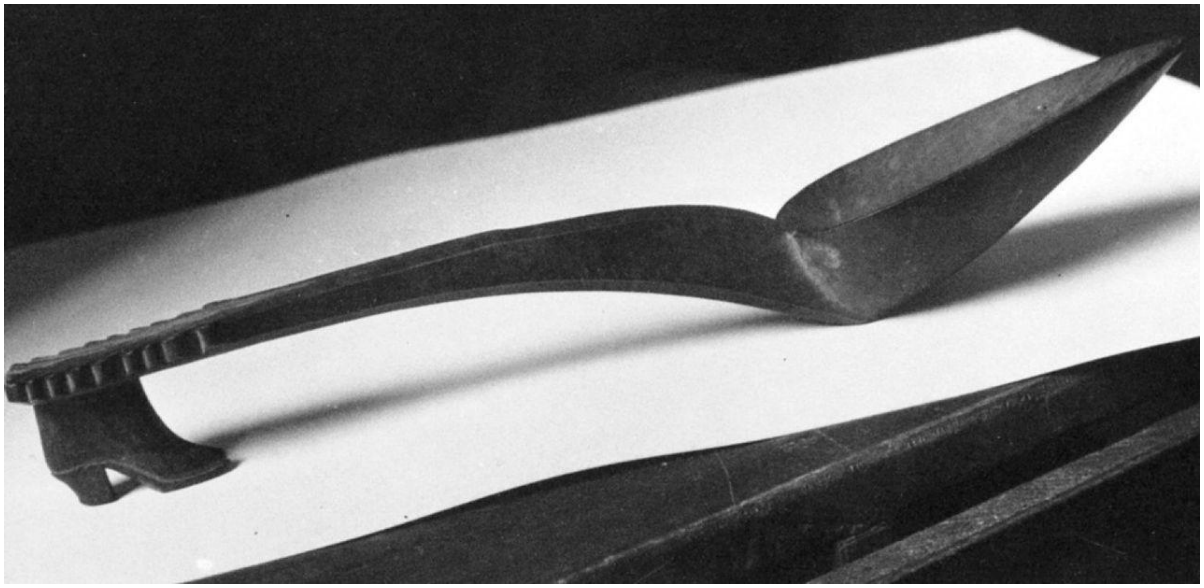
Edouard Manet, *Luncheon on the Grass*, 1863.

Fernand Léger, *The Breakfast*, 1921.

Altogether, this meant that painting in the beginning of the 20th century begged such a new representation that it was incredible to consider it Western, or having stemmed from Greek or Roman ideals, altogether. Luncheons on the grass were replaced by breakfast seen in modernist living rooms, the woman still an other in the world of portraiture.

Culminating in strange works such as this one, the nature of commodity and nature are critiqued through such surrealist landscapes and sculptures such as these. Bending the pleasure/pain principles and death drives Freud spoke of, this sculpture, rather than, through its use, allow us to forgo the thought of death, and release tension in the process, only draws us closer to it. Gone is the fantasy of the teacup and the women you may drink it with; instead, the fur draws out the discomfort of having to drink from a cup of tea altogether. Commodities, at this point fetishized so we may believe each one is perfectly tailored for ourselves, so we may forget of our innate mortality altogether, were the foundation of modern consumer society. Rather than revel in their creations, Oppenheim questions their legacy as being fetishized consumer objects altogether, fetishes, in this case of the religious variety, because as Marx described them, we believe them to have value through our religion of consumerism rather than the human labor and social relations prescribed onto them.

Jeff Koons' entire life's work is a direct symptom of this. Creating religious monuments out of the banality of fetishized consumer works, Koons takes the modern consumer fetish and tries as much as possible to drive the death drive out of them into full force as he closes the gap between the psychosexual and material good altogether. Seen here is his series "The New", a series of vacuum cleaners and fake advertising projects that seek to glorify his mother, and her identity as a fetishized object in American society through consumer goods such as vacuum cleaners, by highlighting the supposed sexual tension Koons finds in these works of art. The vacuum itself is not the fetish alone Koon believes, but rather, the culture that made it into a fetish that is worthy of being turned into religious symbols.



Slipping back into the world of surrealism once more, Andre Breton's slipper spoon tries to, as the surrealists did, convulse the process by which we see into a sculpture, highlighting the process of visual thought without necessitating the written language necessary to describe it. Taking inspiration from the dadaists as well, the origins of the word dada can be metaphorized through this slipper spoon. When children begin to speak language, they first scream out "da", "da", "da", in the singular - but until they say "dada", that is to say, they add a second da to highlight that the first da had meaning, do adults begin to pay attention to them. Breton, upon seeing a slipper spoon of the same caliber in a market, thought of himself the same thing, only this time, in the visual medium. The spoon here can be told and signified as a slipper and spoon at the same time, but only through the inclusion of the boot at the spoon's heel. This unconscious sign, Breton hoped, was interior to all humans, creating a global culture in its own, restrained, image.

Halfway across the world, however, Frida Kahlo, alongside her husband and Mexican counterpart, Diego Rivera, would be creating a visual language that while could be considered Western, was definitely Mexican in nature and origin. Kahlo, having suffered from an intense car crash at a young age, found herself painting visual biographies of herself, depicting her suffering as a woman not only through the physical restraints put on her body, but on the societal restraints put onto her as well. Her husband, an avid adulterer, was a constant source of disappointment for Frida, who saw her split Mexican identity completely differently than the way Europeans described or believed of their own. Taking indigenous Mexican and folkloric low art practices as inspiration for a majority of works, Kahlo was renowned worldwide for her self portraits, portraits that, while directed at men, were never meant to cater to their gazes, nor their fantasies. Seen here is the two Fridas that she saw her husband fighting in between. On the left hand side is the European Frida, the painter he could show off to his male counterparts at Western art shows. On the right hand side, connected by a heartstring, is Mexican Frida, seated with her legs open as if to give birth with her hand covering her pelvis as Olympia's did, this time not in rejection, put in protection, of the future of the nation she hides. Summarizing the entirety of the Mexican identity, and in a grander scope, all women's identities, in a single image, there is no female other to be seen here: only the fantasy Diego Rivera has of her on the left hand side, and her true femininity, not the access to her body, on the right.

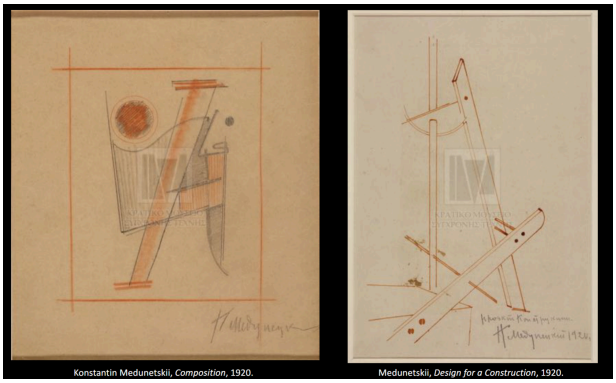
Campbell's CONDENSED CLAM CHOWDER SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHICKEN NOODLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CREAM OF VEGETABLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED ONION SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED GREEN PEA SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED SCOTCH BROTH SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED VEGETABLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED SPLIT PEA WITH HAM SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED VEGETABLE BEEF SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED BEAN WITH BACON SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHEDDAR CHEESE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED Old fashioned TOMATO RICE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED BEEF SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CREAM OF ASPARAGUS SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CREAM OF CELERY SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED BLACK BEAN SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED TURKEY NOODLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED BEEF BROTH (BOUILLON) SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHICKEN GUMBO SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED TURKEY VEGETABLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHILI BEEF SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED VEGETABLE BEAN SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CREAM OF CHICKEN SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CREAM OF MUSHROOM SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED PEPPER POT SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHICKEN SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CONSOMMÉ (BEEF) SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED TOMATO SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED MINESTRONE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED CHICKEN VEGETABLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED BEEF NOODLE SOUP
Campbell's CONDENSED VEGETARIAN VEGETABLE SOUP

Pushing further into the 20th century, Andy Warhol would become infamous for his ability to sell art, not necessarily create it, through its latter half. If Duchamp used irony to meet the complacency of ornamentation of the art world, Warhol, the art world's first true gay man in a world full of hedonistic jocks good at painting, threw the bathtub out with the bathwater as he said "why not just make the consumer good an art piece itself?" Questioning if it even mattered that art was a commodity at all, Warhol makes a biography of the freedom of movement through factory life the most American way possible: by speaking of its ability to make a massive American middle class. Putting onto a canvas one of the most notable aspects of woman's day to day life at the time, buying Campbell chicken and soup for her family and husband, Warhol does the same to the art market, satirizing and saturating it in the process. To summarize John Waters statement on Warhol: "If you don't like it, then why didn't you find a way to sell it?"

KAWS, today's Warhol counterpart and as easily hated as Warhol, takes both Morris' propensity for mass production and Warhol's Americana iconography and blends them into sculptures such as these. Blending the low and high brow of art making, KAWS focuses his efforts onto highlighting the dread of American society, its death drive and consumer fetishization, into mass produced toy sculptures that turned him into a millionaire through their purchase. Now idolized in Miami and by rappers, KAWS has become the de facto face of Western art, using low art cartoons and public tv show characters to highlight the death drive, and capitalist desire, in all of us, while at the same time, being a direct product of it.

Daily Mail
China taunts Trump: Factories flood TikTok with videos urging consumers to buy direct to avoid tariffs
Read the full story on DailyMail.com
make them better

This idea of mass production an ornamentation follows us deep into the social media age, where not only are mass media companies showing us how products are made, and removing the mythology of them in the process, but they are at the same time creating art through social media algorithms the same way Hannah Hoch did: collage of images and videos.



Konstantin Medunetskii, *Composition*, 1920. Medunetskii, *Design for a Construction*, 1920.

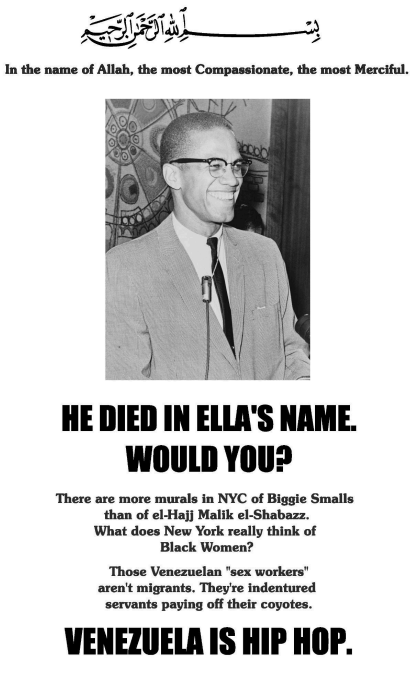
Internet fashion functions similarly to constructivists - on the one hand, there is the composition of fashion that is made into mythology, akin to an artist's studio, and then placed on the body, and on instagram. The person's body can itself be the canvas, or religious fetish, that gives the apparel its value, but on the other hand, the staging of the image itself can also be what makes it a construction. Despite this, a fashion icon such as Aaliyahcore herself is doing something very similar in her maximal use of household objects and discarded fashion items as the constructivists and communists did in their construction, albeit adding a blend of Andy Warhol as well. Clothing, once free from the visual medium of instagram, is then used in its maximal use by adhering to the physical material qualities of the materials as women write biographies of themselves through said art show in the process. Simultaneously trapped and free, the modern woman is conscious of this choice, but endlessly bound to it, defining and defined by it.

What is by now most possibly the most famous painting of the 21st century, *Parsing Bill* is likely to make no ripples in the puddles of the Western art world, on account that Jeffrey Epstein, the man who bought this painting and displayed it at his sex trafficking island, was trafficking young female painters through New York City's art world. A modern day Olympia, Clinton taunts any of those entering his island as he wears the dress of the 22 year old intern he had sex with in the oval office, pointing out to any of the island's visitors that eventually, the dress of the woman they would abuse, would come to be put on and emasculate them.

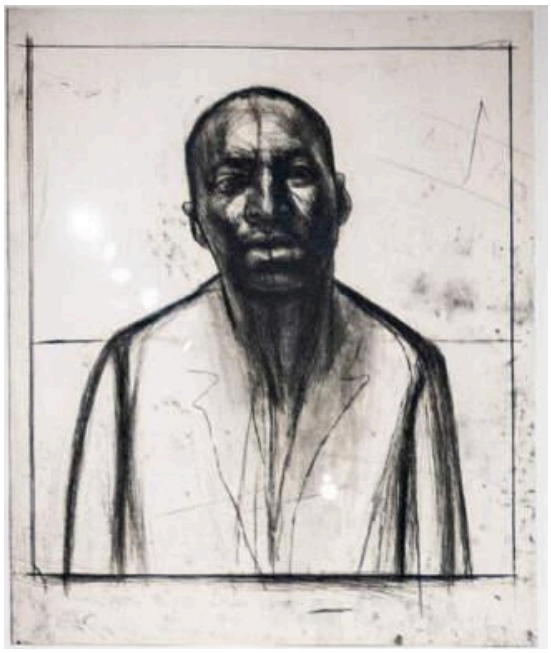
In turn, it means that our original starting point, and the source of this whole mess, *The Oath of the Horatii*, is still applicable to this day - only now, it is not the men taking a stand against the whims of women. Rather, it is men like Bill Clinton who, in failing to undertake civic pride, have only become martyrs of their own hypocrisy, having never truly taken the oath, as Americans wished of them, to begin with.

Instead, the majority of the Western identity could be summed up by the relationship between a man such as Kai Cenat, his Chinese friend Ray, and the mutual “interest” they share in what they consider black, or American, culture. In many ways, the entirety of the West is wrapped up in what it thinks of a man like Kai Cenat, and in turn, the West’s culture has adapted to that definition by supplying Chinese immigrants with the culture they believe Kai Cenat to participate in. In effect, Kai Cenat has been invested with the total identity of the United States, for everything we believe him to be, is what we say of ourselves, and what we believe has been imposed onto him.

Readymades and internet culture have continued into the modern age, not just through memes like trollfaces, but through women such as Belle Delphine as well. Catering to the male gaze, she was able to sell her own bathwater as an ironic inside joke to the shitposters of the 2019 internet landscape, in turn becoming a sort of 21st century Duchamp in the process. Assigning cultural value to a good through meme and internet subcultural knowledge, influencers such as Delphine have in many ways come to shape our world the way artists used to before; where once they assigned cultural value, now influencers do. For this reason, I would argue, formerly, there is no truth - only pornography, and that which we lie to ourselves that is not, and label as art, so we may continue to believe to exist as men.


بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ
In the name of Allah, the most Compassionate, the most Merciful.
HE DIED IN ELLA'S NAME.
WOULD YOU?
There are more murals in NYC of Biggie Smalls than of el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz. What does New York really think of Black Women?
Those Venezuelan "sex workers" aren't migrants. They're indentured servants paying off their coyotes.
VENEZUELA IS HIP HOP.

So, to plug myself and my own art for a second, here is the cover of my first book, pictured on the left, against the black Americans posed for Vogue magazine on the right. I spent a long time looking at the cover of my book, questioning just what about it lacked the off putting quality of the images on the right. I realized that, rather than exploiting Malcolm X's image, I had returned him whole, smiling, not as a sex symbol or something meant to threaten a power structure, but return him whole, as a symbol of love, rather than one meant to represent a new man. In effect, I am returning Marat whole in this image; not as a painting, but rather, as Malcolm X, while Vogue returns Christianity, and its restrictions, through Colman Domingo, Asap Rocky, and Pharell Williams.



Marat's spectre still lingers in the West, the foundational violence that produced him hindered by its inability to fulfill his ideals. Pictured on the right is Martin Luther King, drawn by John Wilson in 2002. Rendered whole in a way differently than associated with King, as simply as a kind, benevolent figure, it is Marat's spirit that haunts him, his benevolence here not seen as a picture of love, but as an extension of a promise unfulfilled. It is an autobiography of generations of violence as the one depicted on the cross Jesus died for - the benevolence of embracing violence nonviolently. It is upon these truths that the foundation of Western philosophy has died for - and it is upon this biography of Martin Luther King that it should hope continue to do so.